

Interview with George Remy  
Conducted by Anna Faherty  
Transcribed by Julia Rhineland, 2021

AF: Hello, this is Anna Faherty, I'm here today, which is October 25th, 2021, and I'm interviewing George Remy.

GR: Hi, my name is George Remy and I'm gonna be interviewed by Anna. I'm looking forward to it.

AF: Great. So, let's start at the beginning. What can you tell me about your childhood?

GR (00:30-05:00): Well, I was born in Springvale, Maine. I was a war baby -- 1941. In fact, I was delivered on 13 Payne St. in Springvale. My mom did not go to the hospital. By Dr. Morse. He was a local family physician. We were located close to Notre Dame Elementary School, which was right across the street, the Ursuline Nuns were there. And that's where I went to school up to the seventh grade. After that I did my 8th grade and high school at St. Ignatius in Sanford, Maine. What about my parents? You want me to -- ? My dad came to the States in 1926. He grew up on a farm about 25 miles east of Montreal. It's a beautiful area. It was very rural and there were mountains nearby. It's kind of interesting how he came. He lost his mother at an early age and he was one of six children. And what happened -- the father went to see the local priest. The priest encouraged him to remarry, 'cause six children on a farm -- so, his father ended up marrying this lady who was a -- she had never been married and she -- we called her an old maid. It was not the greatest thing. She was very strict and she had no compassion, especially where they had lost the mother and there was a lot of grieving. So, he used to -- basically he didn't get along. He used to -- she was really mean to him and so forth so, a couple came up from the States, from Springvale, Maine on their honeymoon. And the gal, Beatrice was her name, she was very kind and very considerate and she picked right up on what was happening. So she encouraged him to come to the States. And sure enough he did. He had a big trunk and \$10 in his pocket, and he took the train from, uh -- I can't remember what town -- and ended up in Portland. And Beatrice and her husband picked him up there. And it was quite an adjustment, where he didn't know how to speak English and so forth, but they had a little grocery store in Springvale for -- finally he decided to get another job, a day job, at -- Springvale at the time had 2 or 3 shoe factories -- and he got a job in a shoe factory and also working at the store, weekends and evenings when they needed him. So this is how he got to the States.

**(05:00-08:30)** My mother was born in a little town called [Hemnal?]. It's right outside of Sherbrooke. And she was one of fourteen children. They lived on a farm, and back then it was very important to have a big family 'cause you needed the help. So they came a little later, because they had relatives in Springvale and they lived on Allen St. in Springvale, which is very close to where we grew up. And she ended up working in the shoe factory when she was single. And she was born to a -- what happened -- my grandmother and her first husband -- he died, and she had, at the time, 12 children there, so back in those days you had to -- she ended up marrying one of the people that was -- farm hands. He was a very nice person. So, my mother and my aunt Isabel were -- they call it the second bed -- *deuxième lit* in French. So that's how -- that's what happened to her. But they settled in, like I said, in Springvale. And that's where my dad met her, and so forth and they got married and, oh my goodness, in the 1930s. I was one of six children. I was in the middle. I had two older sisters who have since passed away and then I have three brothers. So, I went to high school, graduated, and ended up going to Nasson College in Springvale. 'Cause I had to pay my own tuition and so this way I was getting room and board and I ended up going to Nasson for one year, and I wasn't very motivated. You know, when it comes out of your own pocket, you don't want to spend it foolishly, so I decided to take a year off and I was -- I had a little adventure. I heard friends of my grandfather needed a person to drive 'em to Florida. St. Petersburg, so I made arrangements and got the job and had a nice time. I drove Mr. Fleming to St. Pete's and he gave me a ticket to come back to Maine, so that worked out.

**(09:00-11:30)** Meanwhile, there was a podiatrist in town we were real good friends with. He used to come into the store. And he says, "Why don't you go to see if you can get into Thayer-Diggery." Thayer-Diggery was a very nice men's and boy's store in Sanford. And they had been in business a long time. They had really good [lines?]. So he put in a good word for me and, sure enough, I got hired. And it was the best thing for me. They were very good to me. So I worked there a whole year. I learned a lot. My immediate boss was like a father to me. He was a real mentor. Wendell Thayer was his name, and when it came -- when summer came, like May or June, I told him I was probably going to be working at Kennebunk Beach. Well, he didn't want to lose me for the summer so, what he did -- he offered -- 'cause I told him, "I'm going back to school." -- he offered me a \$1,000 bonus to stay. And that was quite a lot of money back in 1961. So I decided to work and, meanwhile, I took a course -- an English course -- in the summer on my lunch break, 'cause I wanted to get that over with. I ended up going to Nasson again and it was nice 'cause I had accumulated a nice wardrobe and I had lost a lot of weight. I was -- it felt good to be back in academia and so I really studied harder and things worked out so I was able to get my degree in history and government and I graduated in 1964.

**(12:00-15:00)** Meanwhile, summers -- I had, for two summers -- I had a great job at the Colony Hotel in Kennebunkport. I was a cocktail waiter in the bar in the Marine Room. And that was the best thing 'cause it got me away from Sanford and I met a lot of nice people and it was a -- gosh, it was very lucrative, the tips. I think I would come home with \$1,000 clear for the summer and back in those days that was pretty good. So I was able to pay my own tuition at Nason and I didn't accumulate any debt because I would -- I made enough money to -- so, meanwhile, this was during the Vietnam -- had just started, '64, '65. And, oh, the second summer I was having such a good time and all of the sudden I get a letter from the draft board -- Kennebunk. They want to see me and so forth, so -- what I did -- I ended up going to Augusta and getting a -- looking up teaching jobs, 'cause I had a history major. So I ended up getting a teaching job in middle school social studies and reading at Leavitt Institute in Turner, so that got me off the hook for a while. So I taught there for two years and the first year in the summertime -- so we -- I had the summer off. I got together with a couple friends that I went to school with, and we decided -- I had a little VW bug, and we ended up going to the west coast -- driving, camping. Took us two weeks. We took our time, we didn't take any major highways and I don't -- I think we stayed in a motel once or twice, but we camped out -- it was a great experience. We ended up in San Francisco. So that was a nice, positive -- really see the country. And I came back to finish my second year at Leavitt. But I wasn't happy in teaching, so meanwhile they stopped giving deferments for teachers, especially single teachers, so the pressure was on again.

**(15:30-19:30)** So I ended up -- what was it now? -- I'm having a senior moment -- joining a reserve unit in Auburn, Maine. It was a hospital group. So that was -- back then, they -- the reserves did not go to war. We stayed Stateside. So I finally did my basic training. I was lucky to go in April at Fort Dix, New Jersey, and then I did my advanced training at Fort Devon's in Massachusetts, so that worked out well. At Fort Devon's I could bring my car and it was great 'cause -- you know, it was like a job, 8 o'clock to 4 o'clock in the afternoon. That was your shift, and then you could -- as long as you came back for formation at 8 you were good. So that worked out very well. So, I came back and went -- I had left Turner -- not that I didn't like it, but I just -- I was -- I had to make decisions and, you know, I wasn't -- I wasn't -- in retrospect, the job was wonderful, the people, my principal, it was a small school, and so forth, but I was just antsy and I wanted to try different things, so I ended up -- I taught one year in Waterboro and, oh, it was awful compared to what I had before -- I mean it wasn't -- so I started taking courses at USM -- night courses. And I decided not to go back to Waterboro, and I was in a group -- what was it called? -- group dynamics course, with the dean of the school, Pat Smith -- really nice people, nice person -- what I had started the program of guidance and counseling, and so he -- we were talking about guidance, you know, at USM -- and what he wanted to do is to replace the house mothers --

'cause each dorm had a house mother -- and kids could not relate to house mothers, so, you know, he strongly encouraged me to apply. And I did, and I got the job. So I became a house director for 2 years, which I really enjoyed, and I got my masters in guidance and counseling. So after that, I -- after I graduated, I was in the job market and, meanwhile, I used to go up to Sugarloaf, and I had a season ticket, and this was my social life. The winters were great, 'cause I could bartend at one of the inns and they'd furnish me board and room, and I had my season ticket so they couldn't --

**[Tape 1 Ends]**

**[Tape 2 Begins]**

AF: Alright, great. So we were talking about Sugarloaf.

[Shuffling]

GR (20:00-22:00): Anyway, this friend in -- I was talking to this friend at Sugarloaf, older guy I'd met at Nasson years ago, and he said, "Gee, why don't you apply for -- we're re-doing the college book store at Bates College, and I'm gonna need a new manager, would you be interested?" I said, "Sure." So I applied for it and got the job and that was interesting 'cause, you know, I had had some business experience at the men's store and so forth and I grew up -- my dad had a grocery store for years and as a kid I used to work there. Punch the clock and he would pay me fifty cents an hour, so I would earn my own clothes -- spending money and clothing money and so forth. So, Bates was a very -- it was interesting, I met a lot of nice people and so forth and I stayed there about eight years. In fact that's where I met my wife. She was a senior and we ended up going out and one thing led to another. We were engaged and so forth. She was from New Jersey. My in-laws were kinda stunned when we got engaged because they had never met me, so we ended up going down to -- they lived in the Jersey Shore. Her father had just retired and he wanted to get away from Montclair New Jersey so they -- we had a nice visit and so forth. We ended up getting married in August, August 3rd. This was 1974, so it's almost 50 years, I can't believe it.

(22:30-26:00) Anyway, after -- I just got -- book rush used to get to me 'cause it was very stressful and so forth, so I decided to go try real estate, and we moved from Lewiston to here in Gorham, and she ended up going to USM and working in the admissions office, getting her masters in Guidance and Counseling. So, I did real estate for a couple years and it wasn't for me, especially working on commission. So I ended up going back to teaching. I filled in at Gorham High School for a year and, oh man, public school. Some of the classes had 30 kids and, you know, Government and U.S.

History were a requirement. So, I was getting headaches Stress-related. I even went to an ophthalmologist and he says, "There's nothing wrong with your eyesight, it's just you're stressed out." So I ended up getting another job -- this was a temporary job for a year. The Elan School in Poland Springs, the infamous Elan School. So this worked out well because we used to work at night and all the kids had therapy during the day, so it worked out well for us because my wife, by that time, had graduated and she had a job at Bonny Eagle as a guidance counselor. And so I would -- and then we had a child, Charles, and so I would stay home during the day, 'cause I didn't have to go to work 'til 5 o'clock. And it was nice 'cause there was a lot of bonding. We'd do fun things. Got to the library story hour and the -- there was a lot of construction going on and we'd go visit the people out -- the construction people, and they'd let him sit in the big dozer or the steam shovel or whatever, and, oh he'd just love that. So it was really nice when we didn't have to bother with day care 'cause I was home and I'd prepare dinner. I love to cook, so when my wife got home, late afternoon, dinner was ready and we'd eat dinner together and then I was off to work.

**(26:00-29:00)** So this went on for quite a few years 'cause I ended up working there for 22 years. That was an experience. Oh man. The kids. We had kids from all over the country and -- but, I mean, it was perfect for me 'cause it was small groups and we could do nice things with the kids, you know, with the faculty. One of the head teachers was an artist and he was very creative, and we -- I felt we really did a lot of quality presentations and the kids really enjoyed it. And what was so nice -- the classes were small and you could really do, you know, meaningful things and the kids appreciate it. So that -- finally in -- I turned 62 and I had had it. I just wanted to -- a change. 'Cause I decided to retire and after I retired from the teaching job, but I also worked part time at Hannaford's just bagging to get out of the house. I did that for about six months and then I got a job at the airport in the visitor's center giving people directions and information. That was fun. 'Cause I'm a native Mainer and people coming from all over the country and the world and, you know, they'd ask questions about Maine, so it was -- I really enjoyed that. But after two years it got old, you know. Especially at night. So anyway. I did that for two years and then I -- this was, what -- now I'm completely retired and my wife was able to retire, 'cause she worked - she left Bonny Eagle -- counseling, she burnt out and ended up going to work at L.L. Bean as a full-time worker. And she finally retired. There's about 11 years difference in age, so she just retired about five years ago, so here we are .

AF: Great. So, I do have a couple of follow-up questions for you. Number one is: did you speak French as a kid?

GR (29:30-32:30): Yes, that's good. Notre Dame School. It was half a day French, half a day English. And I find that very challenging. You know, I had to -- I was not a superstar, I had to work hard. And if I had to do it over again, I would go public school and pick up French. But the nice thing about it too -- my mother spoke French at home. And we used to go up to Canada and visit my dad's relatives, and it was interesting 'cause one summer, three of us -- my older sister and my younger brother -- we went for a week and stayed at an uncle's farm. And, God, we were just seven or eight-years-old, and we got homesick. Oh, we'd call Springvale and cry, "When you comin' up to get us?" And so forth. So -- but it was quite a -- in retrospect it was really a nice exposure to rural life and we had to speak French because they didn't speak English, so it was like an immersion, you know. And even today, I've kept my French because I have a cousin that lives in Montreal, in St. Lambert, and he's very family-oriented. And what he used to do -- he would have a corn party in the summer. Just corn and hot dogs and beer and so forth, and I used to go up and -- well, we all did -- and this is -- I really got to know my relatives on my father's side. And I still -- in fact, I spoke to 'em last night. And I try to speak French, and, you know, he helps me with my vocabulary, so that's been a real godsend, and therefore I've been able to keep up my French language. And it was funny, we took a trip to Paris and I'd give the people hell. I said, "Well, I wanna practice my French." 'Cause they would talk in English, so I would -- they said, "Are you from Quebec?" I said, "No." 'Cause my accent, you know. So the French language -- I'm very fortunate. I've, you know -- I can hold a decent conversation with people, you know, so.

AF: Great.

GR: Yeah.

AF: So, the next question is about your dad's store. Can you tell me a little bit more about the store and what it was like to work there?

GR (33:00-35:00): It was hell. [Laughs] Well, it was right across the street from Nason College and my dad is kind of an entrepreneur. And we're close to the lakes -- there are quite a few lakes in the area -- Mousam Lake, Square Pond, and so forth -- and a lot of people from New Hampshire and Massachusetts come up and so he decided to go into the lobster business. He bought a boat. And I ended up helping him the first year he was -- he bought this boat. It was in Kennebunkport. So we'd get up at four in the morning and head down to Kennebunkport and finally he got a guy to take it over because he -- I mean, he couldn't, you know, with the store business it got to be too much. But anyway, he had got it goin', and he had -- he was the first person in the state to have a -- one of these lobster pools, and it was really, you know, a plus. And so people would stop in on their way to the lakes and buy lobsters. He was the only one in

the area that really had a -- and -- so, I was involved in that and stocking shelves and he also ended up buying a candy business and -- Candy Kisses -- and he had set up in the cellar of his business. Like I said, he was an entrepreneur, and -- but he and I didn't see eye to eye and it was better if -- that's why I decided to go to work at Thayer-Diggory and at The Colony and so forth, 'cause it was healthier to do my thing.

AF: Sure.

GR: Yeah.

AF (35:30): So my next question has got to be about the Elan School. I mean, your description of it doesn't sound like some of the other descriptions that I've heard. [Laughter] Do you have anything to say about that?

GR (36:00-37:00): Yeah, uh -- the education part -- they let -- we had a principal and so forth and we did our own thing. They were very, you know -- they left us alone. They had a lot of positives and some negatives, you know. But -- especially, you know, I saw a lot of kids come in and they were really messed up and two years later they had gotten their head together. Like I say, you got small classes and so forth. That's, you know -- as far as the education part of it, I thought we had reached -- we could reach these kids because some of these kids were coming from hospitals and they had -- there was no learning there, they're just vegging. So, at least they were getting therapy and we were, you know, doing, you know academics with 'em, so I really enjoyed it. Especially after being in public school and the zoos -- you know, that zoo scene. So it was a good experience for me. Very good.

AF: And so then how small were the classes.

GR (37:30): Oh, six, seven, eight kids. Ten kids was a big group, you know. So, that worked out well. See it was divided in houses. I think we had about four houses and it was all diff -- you know -- so it probably -- our house, we had, I'd say probably forty kids max and we'd, you know, split up. So, yeah that was very interesting.

AF: So, was that your favorite job that you had of all your jobs?

GR (38:00-38:30): Yes, I think it was one of the most rewarding, you know. Because it gave you a lot of self-satisfaction to see these kids get it together and, you know, nothing's perfect. The kids -- but over -- there was -- the trouble is there was no follow-up once the kids graduate, that was the sad part about it, but after talking to some of the kids who were graduating, going out -- even if the kid got in a little trouble, it

was not as -- they knew better than get into big trouble, you know. It was minor, so that was a plus.

AF: Yeah, that's good. So -- oh, I'm sorry, did you have anything else?

GR: No.

AF (39:00): So, my next question is about your road trip. That sounded really fun.

GR: Oh yeah.

AF: Where -- where were some highlight places that you stopped?

GR (39:30): Well, we left New York state. We went through New York state. We took the northern route out, and we stopped in Detroit. We stopped in Chicago. We did the -- South Dakota, North Dakota. The -- I can't remember the monument --

AF: The Black Hills?

GR (40:00-41:30): The Black Hills, right. Ended up in Vegas for a couple nights and I -- it was fun, 'cause I called in a high school friend of mine that was working in the casinos and we had dinner with him and he told us the -- you know, he should us around and so forth. That was interesting. And, gosh, where else did we go? Ended up in Los Angeles, and visited another friend in Long Beach. My sister -- one of my sisters was a flight attendant for Pan American then and she was flying out of San Francisco and I should have called her or -- back then you didn't have cell phones or texting, but I had her address and so forth and so I went over to the apartment and her roommate was there, so I just, you know, asked her where my sister was, she says, "She's in South America." So I -- we never got together. So that was one of the stupid things I did, but, you know, I should have planned, but -- yeah, it was a fun trip. We -- it was, you know, really -- you saw different areas and rural areas and urban areas and back then, you now, in the '60s, gosh -- driving in L.A. was not bad, but we took a trip a couple years ago and it's unbelievable. I will never forget it. No way would I drive there. God, you have to have two GPSs just to stay on top of things. Yeah. So.

AF: Well, is there anything else you'd like to add.

GR (42:00-43:00): No, I think we've covered it all. I just kinda -- an overview, you know. I'm fortunate that I've kept my French language and I practice just about every -- you know, a couple -- three times a week. Two times, usually, when I call my cousin, I force

myself to speak French. And he speaks English. He practices. So it's a win-win situation, you know. Yeah, and it came in handy when we were in Paris, I'll tell ya. Sure did. We were able to communicate much better, you know, with the French people. Yeah. And the only problem is my son never learned French, but he majored in Spanish and ended up spending a year studying in Santiago, Chile. So he's kept up his Spanish at the university where he works. He hangs out with a couple native speakers, you know. So, he doesn't want to lose his French. So.

AF (43:30): Well, that sounds great.

**[Tape ends at 24:01]**