

Saturday April 12, 2008

John Nicholas Brown Center/Nightingale-Brown House

Interviewee: Elaine Conaty

Interviewer: Aliza Schiff

Aliza Schiff: So, alright. This is Aliza Schiff and I'm here with – can you please say your name?

Elaine Conaty: Elaine Conaty

Schiff: Okay, it's Saturday April 12th, 2008. We're at the John Nicholas Brown Center in Providence. And just to set the lay of the land, so you know what to expect, I've prepared a list of questions for you, and we'll kind of go chronologically, but you can feel free to guide the conversation anywhere you want, to include anything you think is important. Don't have to answer a question if you don't want to. If you need a break, you can let me know and if you're done, you want to wrap it up, you can just say so and we'll end. And then we've already done the permission slip and when we finish I'll type up the transcript and I'll give you a copy of the transcript and a copy of the recording for you to have.

Conaty: Oh, thank you.

Schiff: Sure. Okay, so let's just check if that recorded. Okay, so like I said I thought we'd just start chronologically and I know from talking with your brother Lou that your parents came from the Azores?

Conaty: Actually, my mother... my father came from the Azores. My mother was Brazilian.

Schiff: Really?

Conaty: She was born in Brazil.

Schiff: Really? And had she gone from... was she Portuguese or...?

Conaty: Yes.

Schiff: Her family was?

Conaty: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Schiff: That's interesting [laughs].

Schiff: Did they ever tell you stories about their life in Brazil or the Azores?

Conaty: Not really, no. They weren't like telling you everything that went on in their childhood. And they actually met here in America and got married here in America. But I can tell you a cute story, though. When my grandfather died -- my mother's father-- who I'd never met, never knew, except for seeing pictures of him... we were not allowed to listen to the radio or have any music or anything, because Vu died. It didn't matter that, you know, I didn't know him rightly, but that was, that was kind of like, like maybe, what you'd call a shiva for Portuguese or something? You know. So that's what we did, you know. You had to have that reverence because he had passed away, even though I'd never known him.

Schiff: That was interesting. Do you know why your parents decided to come to Providence?

Conaty: I'm going to guess that they already had siblings here. Yes, my mother had two sisters and my father had a brother.

Schiff: And did they move directly to Fox Point?

Conaty: I can't be totally sure, but I'm going to say yes, they did, yeah. I've never known them to live anywhere else, so yes, it had to be Fox Point.

Schiff: Okay. What did they do for work here?

Conaty: My mom stayed at home. She had five children that lived, four boys and me, I was the youngest. And my dad worked various jobs but mostly in the slaughterhouse in Pawtucket. And he walked to work. He never had a car, or maybe he sometimes took the bus, and he had his little black metal lunchbox. My mother made his lunch every day. And I could still picture that in my head, you know.

Schiff: Did they speak Portuguese at home?

Conaty: Yes, we did. We did. And my dad spoke more English than my mom only because he was out to work and everything and learnt more. My mother spoke broken English. And my dad did too, but you could understand him a lot better than you could my mother. But we spoke Portuguese in the house.

Schiff: When did you start to learn English?

Conaty: Well, I think it was easier for me because I had already four brothers who had been out to school and everything. So there was more English coming into the home, you know. But I don't ever recall like going out and feeling that I couldn't speak English. I always could. In

fact I probably could speak English better than I could speak Portuguese. And I've totally, unfortunately, lost all of it, because all my, my parents are dead. My aunts and uncles are deceased, so... you lose it.

Schiff: Mmhmmm

Schiff: So you didn't get a chance to teach it to your own children?

Conaty: No, no. Although, I'll just tell you a cute aside. My husband is Irish, but he didn't want to be Poppy or Grampy or whatever else, so in Portuguese the word for grandfather is *Avu* or *Vavu*, so he chose to be just Vu. So this little, this big Irish guy - he's Vu to all his grandchildren. [Laughing] The Portuguese, yeah.

Schiff: [Laughing] That's cute. So can you tell me more about your husband? Where did you meet?

Conaty: Actually, we went to high school together. We were in the same homeroom and we never dated in high school. And we kind of bumped into each other like three months later and, "Hi! How are you?" and everything. "Can I give you call?" "Yeah." And that's how it started.

Schiff: So you met at Hope, Hope High School?

Conaty: At Hope High School. We graduated in 1959.

Schiff: Wow.

Conaty: Yeah, I know!

Schiff: So maybe just to go back and start with your first school, you said you went to the Arnold Street School and then to the Clary School. Is that C- L- A- R- Y?

Conaty: C-L-E-A-R-Y, correct, yeah.

Schiff: E-A-R, okay. And you said that was a parochial school.

Conaty: Yes.

Schiff: Does it still exist?

Conaty: It's still there, the building is still there, I don't know, I think it might be used for other purposes, but the school is still there.

Schiff: Why did your parents decide to send you to parochial school?

Conaty: Your guess is as good as mine. But it was a good thing. Actually all my girlfriends who lived right around me, they were all going to Cleary School and so.

Schiff: Did your brothers go there?

Conaty: No, no. They all went to public school.

Schiff: Huh.

Conaty: Mmmhhmm...

Schiff: Was it hard to switch from a public school to a private, to a parochial school?

Conaty : I don't think so. The nuns were tough, but I think because my friends were there already, my girlfriends, it made the transition a little bit easier.

Schiff: And those were girls from Fox Point?

Conaty: Yes, yes.

Schiff: The girls that you mentioned on the phone.

Conaty: Yes, yes.

Schiff: The four girls. What were their names again?

Conaty: Let's see. It would go Pat Hayes, that's her married name. Pat Silva... I'll give you their maiden names, because they're Portuguese. Pat Silva. Judy Dias. Evelyn Moreira. And myself, Elaine Costa at the time. And we're still friends.

Schiff: And you said. Can you tell me their married names now?

Conaty: Yeah, Pat is Pat Hayes. And Judy is Judy Natale and Evelyn is, I said Moreira didn't I? No, that's her maiden name. Yeah, her married name. No. Pacheco, excuse me. Pacheco. Evelyn Pacheco is her maiden name. Her married name is Evelyn Moreira. And I am Elaine **Conaty** from Costa. [laughs]

Schiff: So, you, did you make new friends, too?

Conaty: Well, yeah, I did. I did. But actually, they were all Fox Pointers, also. But, you know. I mean, like there was Donald Turbitt. And Vicki and Gracie Souza. And we're still friends, we're still friends.

Schiff: So there were a lot of Fox Pointers going to the Cleary School?

Conaty: I'd say, yeah. Yeah.

Schiff: What were, and were there kids from other neighborhoods there, too?

Conaty: Well, what we would call like the East Side, you know, so those were the kids who had money. And we were the kids who didn't have money. [Laughs]

Schiff: Yeah. Do you remember any of the teachers?

Conaty: Sister Consolado, I think she was the ninth grade teacher. And there was one teacher, I don't remember her name, but in retrospect she really had mental issues, yeah. I mean, this is... you are going to think it's crazy but like, actually I remember her throwing some books out the window, but the best story that I know is one of the nuns who put Evelyn's brother David... we had what we called cloakrooms with little hooks for our coats and she actually hung David on the hook. I don't know what he did! [Laughing]

Schiff: Where were the teachers from? Were they from Providence, too?

Conaty: I'm not sure where they were from. I don't. I'm not sure.

Schiff: You didn't know them.

Conaty: No, I really didn't know them like some of the other girls did, especially the Irish girls, because that was an Irish school and I was Portuguese and I've always felt there was a difference, the way the nuns treated us. Yes. Definitely.

Schiff: Do you have any stories about that?

Conaty: No, but I, they, the Irish girls were favored, [statement removed at interviewee's request].

Schiff: But lots of Portuguese kids still went to the school?

Conaty: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Schiff: Because...?

Conaty: Because it was a Catholic school. That's why.

Schiff: So that's what brought the two groups together?

Conaty: Yes, yes. Because we were all Catholic. We might have been Irish or Portuguese, but we were all Catholic.

Schiff: Okay. Where would you and your friends, where did you each live? You told me that you all lived in a little circle? Can you tell me the addresses that you each lived at and what street that was on?

Conaty: Sure, we all lived on Transit Street. Well, actually Judy lived on the corner of Transit and Benefit. And I lived at 79 Transit Street, which was a two family home and Judy's grandmother actually owned it. She lived on the first floor. And my parents and I and my brothers, whoever were home at the time, lived on the second floor. And it was the most beautiful home we've ever had. The most beautiful tenement or apartment, whatever you call it. It had a big beautiful eat-in kitchen, a pantry, three bedrooms, a big bathroom, living room, dining room. And these people were meticulous, so the house was just immaculate. Portuguese people tend to be anal about their cleaning.

Schiff: Really?

Conaty: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. They like everything clean and you know. When I was little, I'm going back a little bit, but when we lived at 125, I think it was 126 Transit Street, I can remember having to go, my job was to scrub the back stairs. We had the bristle brush and I had to scrub the back stairs every weekend. That was my job. But anyway, I lived at 79. Pat lived right next door, I'm not sure of the number. And that was a whole family house, because her mother and father lived there and her brother and her aunt and her grandmother. And the funny thing was they did not have plumbing like we have today. They had like, I don't know what you'd call it, it was like in the basement. And so when Pat started dating and if anybody had to use the bathroom she'd say, "Oh, it's not working. We're waiting for the plumber." The funny thing is Pat's dad is a plumber! [Laughing] But that's how it was then, you know. And then right next door to her was where Judy lived and then right across the street was where Evelyn lived. So we were really, you know, really close.

Schiff: And would you all walk home from school together?

Conaty: Yeah, we were in different grades, but yeah.

Schiff: And then what would you do after school?

Conaty: [Sighs] I had a very boring childhood. My mother was very strict. My mother was extremely strict. Even when I was dating my husband I had to be home at 10:00 at night. Now, when my daughter was home from college she didn't go out until 9:00 at night. It's a whole different ball game. But, we, you know, we worked, Judy and I worked at the bingo at church. I'm trying to think what else we did. I don't know, but we were just always together. Because I wasn't allowed to do a lot I think I fell in love with the library on Hope Street. So I went to the library a lot and to this day I love to read. I totally, it's my first joy in life, is reading.

Schiff: Nobody's told us much about the library on Hope Street. What else, do you have anything else to say about it?

Conaty: Oh, yeah, I mean it was great because my parents never owned a car. Evelyn's dad had a car, I think. They, their parents might have had cars, but my dad never did. And, but

you could walk to everything. You could walk to church, you could walk to school, you could walk to the library. And so I'd go there and I'd get a book and I'd take it home and I was someplace else totally. And that's what kind of what created that love of books for me.

Schiff: Could you spend time there with the book? Could you stay? Did they have a nice set up?

Conaty: Yes. Yes, it did. You know, there was tables that you could sit at and everything, yes.

Schiff: Well I've heard from a lot of the men we've interviewed about the Boys Club. Was there anything comparable for girls?

Conaty: No.

Schiff: Nothing?

Conaty: No. Well, in a religious tone there was. We belonged to the Sodality at the Church. We were, I think it was, Sodality of St. Dorothy. We had medals. And I'm totally forgetting, which I really want to tell you, what we did have with the nuns at Holy Rosary Church, which was the Portuguese church, we would go on Saturday and the nuns would teach us embroidery. And I'm talking some of the girls did beautiful embroidery with silk thread and everything, you know. So that was something that we, that we girls did. But girls were very protected. Where the boys could roam just about anywhere, girls had parameters, you know. You could only go up to this street or that street. My brother got me a babysitting job. My mother would not let me babysit.

Schiff: You couldn't do it?

Conaty: No. She would not let me.

Schiff: So, did you work at all after school? No?

Conaty: No.

Schiff: No.

Conaty: So, thank god I liked to read because I probably would have been bored to death, you know. I mean we did, when the girls got older, like Pat, I don't know if Pat's parents rented a place or they had friends down in Bristol and we'd go for a couple of nights down this house near the beach and when Evelyn got to drive her dad's car, we'd all chip in a quarter for gas. Don't tell them that today! [Laughing] But, I mean there were little pleasures, little pleasures. Not a lot. Actually, we sat on Pat's front stairs a lot, you know. And we'd talk and you know,

and then because, as we were getting older and getting a little bit more freedom, we actually wore shorts. [whispers:] Bad girls!

Schiff: Bad girls? [Laughing]

Conaty: Bad girls. Bad girls. Shorts, you know. And if you didn't sit with your legs together and everything, I mean you know. There'd be talk about us because we just were sitting on the stairs we had nothing else to do and that's what people did in those days. They would sit on the front stoop, you know, but that's what we'd do. We'd sit and we'd talk and that was all, that was one of the pleasures that we had.

Schiff: What was, you said the Sodality. I don't know what that is.

Conaty: It's like a Christian organization for young girls. And it was from the church and we'd have meetings, you know. And then you'd, I'm not even sure what the meetings were about. I don't ever recall anything being like any like kind of trips or anything like that. Just maybe that you'd meet and the nuns would talk to you and things like that.

Schiff: Socialize?

Conaty: Yeah, socialize, there you go.

Schiff: Okay and you went to, you said you went to the catchi-catchi – catechism classes?

Conaty: Yeah, I did. Yeah.

Schiff: So all four of you [girlfriends] went to Holy Rosary Church?

Conaty: Yes, all four of us are Portuguese.

Schiff: Okay. How often did you have to go to class there?

Conaty: It might have been like once a week, like to make your first holy communion and then there'd be years you didn't go. And then for your confirmation, you know, you'd go to, you'd go to classes again because you were going to make your confirmation.

Schiff: Did your brothers do that?

Conaty: I believe they did. They all made the sacraments.

Schiff: And then when you met friends at Cleary School, then you had friends that went to other churches... I guess?

Conaty: No, they were Portuguese, too. Yeah like Vickie and Gracie, they're Portuguese. They went to Holy Rosary. I mean there were the O'Rourke twins and they belonged to St.

Joseph's, you know. Definitely were not Portuguese and I met them, two nice girls. But mainly my friends happened to be Portuguese.

Schiff: Do you think they just "happened to be"?

Conaty: Yeah. They just happened to be. It wasn't that, you know, like, we didn't like them because so and so was Irish or so and so came from... There was none of that. None of that at all. And that's what, you know, today with all the racism and things that are not so good in the world. When I went to Hope High School it was whites, blacks, and Jews. And, but it wasn't... we were just kids! You know... It wasn't like he's Jewish or he's black. We were just kids in high school.

Schiff: Yeah. Just to go back to when you were talking about plumbing at your friend's house. It just made me think of a story that your brother told us about, I don't know what age you would have been when this took place, but he said that when, there was a house that your family lived at where there wasn't plumbing. And that the boys would all take a bath and you had to take the last bath. He said "My little sister had to take the last bath." [Laughing] Do you remember that?

Conaty: [Laughing] No, I don't! Because that might have been Brook Street and I can only remember Transit Street where we had a bathroom, however we did not have hot running water. So I can remember in the kitchen and there was a space, a gas space heater and there was a drawer on each side and in the wintertime the boys would be there in their underwear trying to warm up in the morning. And I can remember my mother would fill a big metal tub and it would be sitting on the kitchen table. She'd fill that with hot water and that's where I had my bath.

Schiff: On the table?

Conaty: On the table in the big tub, the big metal tub.

Schiff: How old were you when that went on?

Conaty: I was probably like five and six, you know. Four, five, and six, yeah.

Schiff: And you remember.

Conaty: Yeah, yeah. And I remember. I have straight hair. This, [patting her head] this excuse me, this is called a chemo cut. It's just growing out, you know. So I'm trying to be like a little punk rocker now. [Laughing]

Schiff: It's cute!

Conaty: But, um I've always had straight hair, so my mom used to like do the big rags and kind of like make banana curls and you know, things like that.

Schiff: So how much younger were you than your brothers?

Conaty: My oldest brother who just passed away a few years ago was eleven years older than me. And then I had another brother Ernie, I even forget how old, no Anthony –Tony – Eddie, Ernie, and Lou. Lou and I are four years apart, but I call us twins. I say we're twins four years apart. We look alike, we think alike. We like everything alike, except he doesn't like cats and I do.

Schiff: [Laughing] That's funny. What kind of chores did you have at home growing up?

Conaty: Well, I had to keep my room clean. Like I said, I used to have to wash the back stairs and one thing that, in those days we didn't have the big supermarkets, my parents never had a car. And there were two Portuguese markets on Brook Street and my mother had a book and almost every day after school, she would send me to the store, tell me what she wanted, whether it was meat, or vegetables, whatever she wanted. And I would walk down to the store, it was Joe's Market, and I would get whatever she wanted and they would mark it in the book and then she would pay for it at the end of the week. And I would bring that home, which was fine and then we moved further up Transit Street towards Benefit Street and she would still send me to the store and it seemed like, like, oh my god, it was like such a long walk. But that's what we did and I was kind of like, you know, little grocery girl. Yeah.

Schiff: Did you help with the cooking?

Conaty: No, I didn't. And to this day I hate to cook.

Schiff: Really?

Conaty: Yeah, I do. And my mother was a good cook. What she cooked she cooked extremely well. It was very, very tasteful.

Schiff: Do you remember any of the dishes?

Conaty: Yeah, her chicken with rice was excellent, oh my god. My dad's Portuguese soup was great.

Schiff: What's in that?

Conaty: That I do make. That's kale and potatoes and chourice, which is a sausage, a spicy sausage, and beans, lots of beans. And it's very hearty and very good in the wintertime. And with Portuguese bread, of course.

Schiff: Yeah, I've heard about some bakeries that used to exist in Fox Point. Did you have to go to those, too?

Conaty: I did. I'd have to go and get the Portuguese bread. Yeah, I'd go and get the Portuguese bread, yeah.

Schiff: And what kinds of chores would your brothers be responsible for?

Conaty: I can remember my brothers washing the kitchen floor, splitting it. My mother was not an extremely healthy woman, so... She had five kids, you know. And I'd come home from school on a Tuesday and there'd be all their white shirts all ironed on hangers hanging on the door. That was, that was enough work for anybody, especially in those days, you know. But they helped wash the floor. My father was always very good, he was always very helpful. He was a wonderful man, quiet, nice man. One of the things he used to do on Friday nights there was a Portuguese Social Club on Sheldon Street and he would go there and he'd drink with the guys and everything. There was always things for men – there were barrooms and clubs – there was never anything for women! And but, I'd wake up the next morning and there'd be a bag of Planter's peanuts under my pillow that he would leave there for me. And now that I think, it was like leaving a hundred dollar bill to me, then, you know.

Schiff: Just for you?

Conaty: Just for me, yup. The boys didn't get it. Just me.

Schiff: Did you feel special?

Conaty: They made, my brothers always made me feel special, being the only girl. They were always very good to me.

Schiff: So I've heard that some Portuguese families in Fox Point had grape vines in the backyard and that they made their own wine.

Conaty: Yes.

Schiff: Did yours?

Conaty: No, my father didn't. But my uncle did and my uncle also owned a barroom.

Schiff: Really?

Conaty: Yes, yes, on Wickenden Street.

Schiff: Which one?

Conaty: Do you know where the Coffee Exchange is? It's right across the street – I don't know if it's a gallery now, or something - but right there, and there's a big like three story house above it. And the yard to the right of it, if you're facing it, there was now its parking, it was grass there. And I have pictures of my family with my uncle we called him Disheik, that means Uncle,

Sheik whatever, Sheik might be “Frank,” I’m not sure. But he came to visit and we have pictures of my mother and her sister and my uncle, my brother Ernie in that yard.

Schiff: What was the bar that he owned called?

Conaty: I don’t know. I don’t know. I can’t think of it off hand. My brother Lou would know. He’d know all that stuff.

Schiff: Right. Can you tell me more about, we talked a little bit about Hope High School. And you said that you and your husband both graduated from there. Did you say ’59?

Conaty: Yes.

Schiff: Okay, but I know that quite a few of the people that we’ve interviewed, particularly the men, quit school to work or join the military, but you and your husband both finished. Did you ever feel any pressure to, to leave school?

Conaty: Never, never. I might have felt pressure just the opposite – to stay in school. But never to leave school. My brother Eddie quit school like in the eighth grade and helped my parents. He got a job and helped. Lou quit school in high school and went in the Navy. Made a wonderful career and became an electrician and everything. It was a wonderful thing for him. And my brother Tony, my oldest brother actually went on, he was the only one in the family, went on and graduated from Brown University, which I was very proud of him, for that.

Schiff: Right. And so when you finished high school was there a big celebration for you?

Conaty: No, no, not really. You know, I went to my proms, that was a big thing. No there was no big, there was no party and things like that, you know. I graduated and was expected to get a job and you know. And like I say, I met my husband and we started dating and we graduated in ’59 and got married in ’62 and I got pregnant right away. Those days you didn’t work up until you were going to deliver, so I think I left my job like in October and Kelly was born in March.

Schiff: And so I think you had told me that you worked downtown.

Conaty: Right. At Amica Insurance.

Schiff: Was that, did most of your girlfriends try to get jobs downtown?

Conaty: Pat went on to college. Evelyn got married young at 18 or 19. And Judy and I both worked at Amica. But we all got married fairly young. You know, I think it was Evelyn, Judy, me, and Pat. In that order that we got married. So we were in our twenties any way, we were all young.

Schiff: What did you do at the insurance company?

Conaty: I don't remember. Just some kind of typing work, you know, with policies and everything. I really don't recall.

Schiff: Let's see. There was something you said that made me think of something I wanted to ask you [pause]. Did you ever go back to work after you had your kids?

Conaty: No, well, not until I had all three of them and at that time a new thing was beginning – the malls. And I got a job at Filene's Lingerie Department part time at night. And I worked like three nights a week, like that. And that's how, and I did that while the kids were growing up. I did that for like seven years and then I got a little job in a jewelry shop working mother's hours while the kids were in school, like say from 9 to 2:30. And then when the kids got bigger I got a job at the Providence Journal and I worked there for fourteen years. And retired there. They had a buyout when I was fifty-five. You had to be fifty-five. I was. I took the buyout because it was a good deal. I've never, you know, worked out of the house after that.

Schiff: What did you do for the Providence Journal?

Conaty: If you get the paper you see all those wonderful ads. There was this big machine. I would feed the machine. That's what we would do. Feed those machines that paper. And it kind of like, you know, would fall in a slot. The comics were first and then like all these ads would fall and the comics would open and all the ads were in a slot and they'd fall into the comics. And then they'd come out the end of this roller and we'd have to bind them up, or actually a machine did that and the guys took care of that. But mostly the girls would feed the machine with these ads. Some of them were easy and some of them were very heavy and tough. It was, you know, I was amazed at some of the older women that worked there. They were really, you know, they really *had* to work. I was fortunate enough that my work, my money could go for myself and I saved, you know. And then if we needed some money and we didn't have it, I'd just take it out of the credit union, you know.

Schiff: So it was physical work, then?

Conaty: It was very physical, but yeah, it was, but it kept me in shape, you know, really. But it was very physical, very tiring and I'm not a high energy person. And so a lot of times I'd want to just come home and sack out.

Schiff: Who were the other women that you worked with? You said it was mostly girls feeding the machine.

Conaty: Yeah. It's women actually. Women. Yeah, my age, you know. There was Thelma and Lorraine, who were sister-in-laws, and there was Mary and another Elaine, Joyce. All nice women, all nice women. And I have to say, like sometimes if you have a hard product, most of

the people next to you if their product was easy they'd have no problems helping you, you know. So it was hard work, but it was a decent job, pay was decent and there were benefits. After a while we finally got benefits, so that was good.

Schiff: Did you have to be there a certain amount of time to get benefits?

Conaty: There was no union. They didn't want a union, but the union finally did come in, yeah, and that's when Bi-Lo took over and that's when they had the buyout and everything. But I'd been in there a while, you know, and I'd saved and I had medical benefits and everything. You had to work twenty one and a half hours a week to be eligible for benefits.

Schiff: So about half-time. And you did?

Conaty: Yeah, yeah. And there were some people that, you know, Thanksgiving season was extremely busy because there's a lot of ads for Christmas season and a lot of the women worked double shifts or you could come they'd need you on a Saturday. You know, you'd come in on a Saturday, you know. There was a schedule, you didn't just come in, you had to be scheduled. So they'd have enough people.

Schiff: Yeah. That's interesting. And what did your husband do?

Conaty: After high school Bud worked for Grinnell and I can recall him going in and asking for like a nickel raise and they told him no, so he quit and I went, "Oh my god!"

Schiff: What was Grinnell?

Conaty: I think they used to make like fire extinguishers and things like that. It was a company like on Exchange Street just something around there. And after that, I have to say, my husband is very resourceful. He has shoveled snow on the East Side to make money. Lou knew people who worked down the docks and he would get Buddy jobs down the docks and then finally when Kelly was six months old, my husband started working at the Journal, in the evenings. And then he got a job at the electric company and that was his main job. When he retired he was a head lineman for the electric company, but he worked like almost thirty years for the Journal. So he worked two jobs almost his whole life.

Schiff: Really?

Conaty: Yeah, yeah. Very hard worker.

Schiff: What did he do for the Journal?

Conaty: He drove truck. He would deliver, you know, the bundles out, you know, leave them on the corners for the delivery people. That's what he did. And he, he'd go to Fall River and you know wherever your route was. And it was hard in the bad weather. And then he'd come

home and he was lucky if he got an hour of sleep. Sometimes he didn't even get that. He'd just have to, like, you know, shower and go to his next job. His regular job was seven to three. Seven to three? Yeah, at the electric company.

Schiff: So did he get to see the kids?

Conaty: Not very much, no. No. There are always things that you regret later on. And he didn't see the kids because he worked so hard.

Schiff: And then you worked part of the day, too?

Conaty: Yeah, yeah. Well I always worked while they were in school mostly, except when I worked nights that, at Filene's, but...

Schiff: Yeah. So can you tell me more about when you met? I think that sounds interesting.

Conaty: We met under a clock. I don't know if it was the Old Stone Bank on the corner of Westminster Street. And I was on my lunch hour or something. And "Elaine, how are you?" "Buddy, how are you?" "How have you been?" "Good, good!" You know, small talk. And the funny thing was my husband has beautiful eyes and I always liked him in, in, as a friend in high school but I'd look at him and go "Oh, my god he's got the most gorgeous eyelashes!" And you know my grandchildren have those eyelashes now! [Laughing] But and he called me and he was poor, he came from a poor family. His parents didn't have much. They never owned a home. And then we just started dating. Going to the movies, going out to eat and everything. And then it just evolved from that.

Schiff: And what about when you introduced him to your parents and your brothers?

Conaty: My brothers were always good. But, my mother was funny because his parents smoked and my mother-in-law made, she loved to make afghans, and she gave me one and I brought it home and my mother said, "They smoke." I said, "Yes, they smoke." But, actually once they met each other they got along very well. My father-in-law liked to drink and my father made wine, to there was a wonderful connection. But they got along very well in their broken, my dad's broken English and you know, and Mr. Conaty, Bud, would come to the house when we lived in East Providence and sit in the backyard, under the big tree and... it was good. My mother-in-law was a wonderful, wonderful lady. Wonderful lady.

Schiff: They were Irish you said?

Conaty: Irish, yes.

Schiff: Did they come? Were they immigrants.

Conaty: No they were not. No, they were born here.

Schiff: And how about, how about, so your brothers they were fine?

Conaty: Oh, yeah, my brothers were fine. Yeah. My brothers were good to me. Like when I went to my proms my brother Ernie gave me a twenty dollar bill to stick inside my, my gown, in case the boy didn't have money or I needed to get home, you know...

Schiff: That's a lot of money!

Conaty: Yeah, darn right it was a lot of money in those days, yeah, yeah...

Schiff: Wow. And what about your wedding?

Conaty: My wedding was small. I'd just lost my mother. In retrospect, I should not have gotten married so soon. It was hard on my dad. My mom died in February and I got married that June. So now I think I might have been a little bit insensitive, you know, but... Like with, when the doctor told me I had breast cancer, and I kind of was like in disbelief, but he said, "It is what it is." And that's how it was then. You know, it was what it was, that's how it was. I can't change it. But anyway, it was a small wedding. And I lived with my dad for a short time, but then Bud and I got a little apartment on the third floor with no front door. In Smith Hill and my dad helped paint the kitchen and everything for us. And, you know, we had it tough in the beginning, you know. And now, you know, now that I think of it, mostly all the men that were in my wedding party are deceased, except for my brother Eddie. Billy Bannen, Bill Whitehead, George [Coelho?], they're all gone, they all died. Sad.

Schiff: Where was the wedding?

Conaty: The wedding was at a place called Ballard's downtown. It's no longer there. And I didn't know anything, I was really young and naïve. Buddy's Aunt Mary was very helpful securing a place and we had a nice little, we got married at St. Francis Xavier Church in East Providence...

Schiff: So not at Holy Rosary?

Conaty: No, and that's a regret. I wish I had, you know... In fact, I told my husband I want to be buried from Holy Rosary Church. That's really my only true church. I loved it. My mother would make me go to novenas, I mean make me. Because you know when you're a kid that age, even if you're doing nothing, you want to sit on the front stairs with your girlfriends. But we had to go to novena and I'd be sitting there like fuming and you know, now I'm so grateful that she did. I am -- because my mother's faith was wonderful and Good lady and..... Just some nice things that happened at that church. We had May Processions and the girls would all wear white and some of us would be angels. My brother Lou has great pictures. We have our big furry wings

on and everything. And the older men would carry the statue of Santo Christo, it's actually, I believe it's Jesus, but he's with the thorns on his head and he had the red cape and it was a Portuguese thing that was kept, brought here, you know. And that was, there would be all kinds of Portuguese food. There'd be like a feast, a festival! And they still have that, they still have that and that's a wonderful thing. Some of the people that I know will go back there, just for the Portuguese food and see people they haven't seen in thirty or forty years.

Schiff: How did you, how about your kids, did they ever get to be involved in anything like that?

Conaty: No, no. Very sad. Very sad. No they didn't.

Schiff: Are they interested in it?

Conaty: My daughter Tracy's interested in her heritage. She's more curious than the other two. She'll ask questions and she'll, you know, she's on the computer and she'll save things. Lou has sent her a whole history of our family that he has and she was very grateful for that. So she, you know, she has the interest.

Schiff: So you, you, it seemed like you were about to start telling me about the place Ballard's and how your husband's aunt helped find the place...

Conaty: Buddy's Aunt Mary. She helped us with the wedding. She actually bought my wedding earrings. Little pearls which I still have to this day. Hope maybe my granddaughter will wear them someday. Or, now I have two granddaughters. Yeah and, and there was a big, like swordfish on the back wall, so there's pictures of Bud and I at the head table and everything and this big fish on the back wall [Laughing]. And I can remember my cousin Louise brought her daughter up and I went to kiss Kelly, her daughter Kelly was just a little one at the time. And I bent over and my veil caught on fire!

Schiff: No!

Conaty: There were candles lit, yeah, and you know, we extinguished it quickly but, I can remember that. But my, my cousin Louise is dead and my cousin Betty is gone. My, all my aunts are gone. It's just sad, you know, so you lose a lot, you lose a lot. When my kids were little I would bring them, like especially on holidays, and I can remember Easter because my son who's now like forty one, in this little blue linen coat and little blue short pants and white knee socks to visit my aunt. You know, for her to see my children, I had all three of them then. And we'd go to visit her at Easter time and everything. She was elderly. She lived over the barroom on the second floor.

Schiff: On Wickenden?

Conaty: On Wickenden. She lived over the bar, my Aunt Hortense, yes.

Schiff: I have an Aunt Hortense [laughing].

Conaty: Do you? Oh, okay.

Schiff: So can you tell me about Smith Hill? I don't know anything about that neighborhood.

Conaty: It was the, it was the Irish Fox Point. That's what I, that's what I think, you know, lots of Irish lived there. And my husband came from there and St. Patrick's Church was there, so you can see the connection. And, a lot of the boys, my husband's friends, they all went to Hope High School and they walked. Nobody had money for busses and you know. And he tells me stories about like, they'd walk to school and they'd get there from Smith Hill, which is quite a hike, it's miles and miles, and they'd say "Feel like going to school today?" and Billy might say, "Nah." And they'd, they'd walk back home. I'd say "You're crazy! You're already there!" you know. But it was a very ethnic place, it was a poor place and I think what saved a lot of the kids was that they got involved in sports. My husband has some brothers who for whatever reason, you know, one was too lazy to work, where Bud was always willing to work, he knew he had to work to get anything. But he played sports and that was his salvation because it kept him, he wasn't going to quit high school because he was on the basketball team and everything. You know, I have pictures of him. And so he graduated which was I think a wonderful thing for a lot of kids who were not going on to college. But sports kept them in school and then afterwards, he's always played ball all his life, he played, that's where he met our best man, who kind of like took him under his wing, Bill Whitehead, was a wonderful man, who's now deceased. Buddy played softball and baseball and Buddy, he umpired later on in years, he umpired girls' games, my daughter Tracy played ball. But they had a lot of pick-up games at St. Patrick's play yard, the boys and... a very poor neighborhood, though, they were poor. Even, I think, they were poorer than we were in Smith, in Fox Point. I can remember his mother like really not having anything. And food, I forget, she'd make this thing like with little bits of jelly and that would be like almost like a desert, where my dad was a butcher, worked at you know, so we always had meat, we always had decent meals. But his family was quite poor. A lot of the people there were poor.

Schiff: And you moved there? After you got married.

Conaty: I moved there, yeah. On Felix Street on the third floor, yeah. And then my brother Lou was in the Navy and he bought a house in Smith Hill, on Pembroke Avenue, a three family and he was still in the Navy and Bud and I moved into the second floor and kind of like looked after it for him and everything. So, I'll have to tell you, my brother Lou, he has done more things for my husband and I. He is just a, a really good person. He's got a good heart. And I'll tell you a cute story. When I had Kelly, we still didn't have a pot to pee in. He gave me his charge to the Outlet Company, which was a big department store in Providence and he said, "See if this

works... go and get Kelly something.” So I think I bought her her first pair of shoes with his, well he, you know with his charge. “It works, Lou, it works, yeah.” And he’s, he’s to this day, he’s still good. But, so he bought a three family house in Smith Hill. And we lived there, until we finally bought a little ranch house in North Providence and that’s where my kids grew up.

Schiff: Oh,okay. Did his wife live in the house that he had bought when you were living there?

Conaty: No, no, they weren’t married. He was not married. He was not married.

Schiff: Oh, he bought a house before he was married?

Conaty: He was not married. Yup. And then he went on to have seven children. But now his wife Judy, she was also a dear friend. She lived across the street from me. And we walked to Hope High School. And to this day, we’re not just sister-in-laws, we’re good friends, you know. She always helped me when, you know, she has seven kids, but she was a lot better with kids than I was, I only had three! Seven children, she was, you know a wonderful mother. She’s just a good kind human being. I think a lot of good kind people came out of Fox Point. Yeah, yeah. When I was diagnosed, I got, with breast cancer, I mean, I heard from people I haven’t heard from in years. I got cards and mass cards and prayer wishes and phone calls. It was amazing. And I thought, “Oh, my god. You know, I have to get well for my friends.” I mean that’s, you know, that’s what it, to me that’s Fox Point.

Schiff: Mmmm

Conaty: It was a wonderful time, even though we might have not, I remember, when I look back it really was a good time, you know. My brothers used to make bonfires on the fourth of July, right in the middle of the street. And because we didn’t have a lot, the house we lived in, there was a garage next to it, and there was a fence that ran alongside and in the fall we’d pile up all the leaves, climb up on the fence, even the girls, me anyway. We’d go up on the roof of the garage and jump off into the pile of leaves. [Laughing] Yeah, tell a kid that today, it’s like “Oh, no I’m gonna go drive my car that’s got a big battery in the driveway.” You know, my grandchildren. But, that’s how it was then.

Schiff: That sounds fun.

Conaty: Yeah, yeah. You know and we played tag, hide and seek, kick the can, all those things that I’ve forgotten about. You’re bringing back these memories.

Schiff: Did the girls and the boys play everything together? These kinds of games?

Conaty: Yeah, yeah.

Schiff: Just whoever was around?

Conaty: Yeah, whoever was around. And it even was that way when my kids were growing up in North Providence. All the neighborhood kids, they'd play like touch football in the street in front of the house and everything, you know, boys and girls. My daughter Tracy was a big tomboy. She's always played sports, you know.

Schiff: What was North Providence like?

Conaty: [Sighs] It was a whole other world. Yeah, because I couldn't just walk, I had to have a car, I couldn't just walk anyplace, to the market, to any place. You know, you had to have a car. So a lot of times I would have to take my husband to work in order to have a car. It'd mean you know, getting the kids up early and getting in the car and coming home, getting ready, take them to school. Until, I, it was years later, well a few years later that I finally got a car of my own. But in North Providence, I found a nice church there, I met some nice people, I met my friend Connie who's my dear, dear friend to this day. I don't make a lot of friends easily. I tend to be more shy. And I don't socialize, like join sororities and clubs and things like that, you know. But, North Providence was nice. It's very ethnic. It's very Italian. Very Italian. And, so they have wonderful markets and wonderful foods. It was, it was a good place to bring up the kids. It was fun.

Schiff: And you had all three of your kids there? Or you, when had you had...

Conaty: No, Kelly was born when we lived on Felix Street in Smith Hill. Tracy was born when we moved into Lou's house on Pembroke Avenue, and Chris was born there also and we moved when he was a year old. To North Providence.

Schiff: What year would that have been?

Conaty: 1963, 64, about maybe like 1968, late 60s.

Schiff: On the phone you told me the funny story about having, you had your baby right after you got married. Can you talk about that?

Conaty: I can. This is my brother Lou. I was married, I was married June 23, 1962. And Kelly was born March 29, March 24th of the following year. My brother Lou always says to me, "That one day saved you!" [Laughing] And I used to feel funny and then I said, wait a minute, I think, you know, pregnancy is nine months long, so you know, nine months and one day. In those days people, like, oh my god, you know. Not like today. There was talk. But it never bothered me because nine months and one day, he was right. That one day saved me.[Laughing] She was my honeymoon baby. Yeah, yeah.

Schiff: Did you go anywhere for your honeymoon?

Conaty: Yes, we did. We went to the Pocono Mountains. It was very nice, too. Bud drove. We had this Plymouth. And we got lost in White Plains, New York. Yeah, [laughing], but it was a nice... we met some nice couples there, we kept in touch with, you know later on, we eventually lost touch, but it was nice, you know. It was, it was a good honeymoon. It was a nice place. It was totally new, because I'm a city girl. So being out in the country and everything. I'm a city girl.

Schiff: What did you do in the country?

Conaty: I have pictures of us bowling and I'm saying, why were we bowling there? But there was swimming and there might have been like hikes and things, you know... and they'd have this big hall where you'd go for dinner and everything. You can meet other people. It was nice.

Schiff: Lots of honeymooners?

Conaty: Oh, definitely. All honeymooners. Yeah, that was like honeymoon haven there. I think because it was nice and it was affordable.

Schiff: Well my grandparents just told me a few weeks ago a story that they went to Maine for their honeymoon. You know, they lived in New York so they went to Maine and it sounded like a similar type of place.

Conaty: Yeah, yeah.

Schiff: Cabins, little cabins.

Conaty: Exactly, yeah.

Schiff: And did you always think you'd have a baby right away?

Conaty: No, I didn't even give it a thought. Before I even thought about it I was pregnant. Young and naïve.

Schiff: You just thought you'd work for a while?

Conaty: Definitely. Yeah, work for a while and help out, you know. But it just didn't work out that way...

Schiff: Do you remember back then what your plans were for... for your life?

Conaty: I don't. I'm not sure honestly, I even hate to say it, that I gave it much thought. In those days, girls got married and had families and stayed home and took care of their children and so, I guess I thought that's what I would do, just not that I wouldn't have children so soon. You know. But it happened and Kelly was three and then I had Tracy. And Tracy was just a few

months old and I got pregnant with Chris. They're thirteen months apart. So I had my hands full. I didn't need to think about anything else after that. Yeah, yeah. But I'm happy to say they were all good kids, they've all got good jobs and families. They're wonderful, they're really good kids.

Schiff: And, I, I was surprised when you said Lou had seven kids.

Conaty: Yes, yeah Lou has seven kids. He has five boys and two girls. And that was, that was hard for Judy. As good as she was, I mean she, I mean talk about multi-tasking, breastfeeding, reading, you know. Or tying somebody's shoe. She was, you know, that's a big family. She's not a complainer like I am. But it was difficult. No, it was difficult. When she had, I think I told you this, when she had Jason it was during the Blizzard of '78 and so she was stuck in the hospital and they managed to get her home after a few days, but they could only leave her at the end of her street because nothing had been plowed yet on her street. So I don't know if the police brought her home or what, but she got home with Jason. I think her mom was there and maybe her dad, although they'd been divorced for many years, but Tracy and I walked from North Providence [to] over to, over near PC, Providence to go see Judy and the new baby during, after the Blizzard. Because everybody was so friendly then. Just like one big family. But, yeah that was, you know. When I look at my kids now and all the things they have. My grandchildren, I go, oh my god, you know. If I got a doll for Christmas it was something. And it was wonderful, because that's all we know. Today...it's like Toys-R-Us under the tree. I don't like it.

Schiff: No?

Conaty: No. I'm getting a lot like my mother. I don't like it. It's too much. An overabundance of stuff.

Schiff: Oh, yeah. Would you, did you make things when you were a kid? Did you do crafts or make toys?

Conaty: The only thing I can remember making is, they had like a little loom. You had these pieces of yarn, you'd make potholders. Or, or with gimp, you'd make these long things with gimp it was called. Yeah! Oh my god I haven't thought about that in years and years and years [Laughing]! Yeah, but I mean I really, my childhood was not filled with a lot of things and going places and doing... One thing I remember was getting on the bus with my parents and going to Roger Williams Park. And they would put me on the dummy horse., So that was a big outing. And then later when I got to be a teenager and didn't want to go anywhere with my parents, my aunt and uncle who had a car would pick up my mom and dad and they'd go out for a Sunday ride, which I thought was wonderful. That reminded me of something. We lived down Transit Street. My aunt and uncle lived on Brook Street. My other aunt and uncle lived on Wickenden Street. The people that lived on Brook Street it was like two houses with a big, I call it a courtyard in the back, and then there was a big raised plot of land and they had flowers and

everything, and my aunts and my uncles would all congregate there. In the evenings, in the summertime. And sit and talk and chat and that was like their socializing, you know, something for them to do. That was something for them to look forward to, and I can remember that, yeah. Yeah, going down with my parents and all the aunts and uncles and cousins would be there.

Schiff: The summertime must have been nice down there.

Conaty: It was, it was very nice, yeah. And you know nobody had an air conditioning, definitely, you know. I can recall one time a hot, hot summer evening in that house on Transit Street that we, that I loved, but the house next to it was really close. It was one of those nights where it was like 85 and hot and humid. No fan, nothing. I can remember moving from this side of the bed to that side. Sticking my feet in the windowsill trying to get some air, you know. Yeah. We didn't have too many comforts. But we had heat in the wintertime so I can't complain.

Schiff: Yeah. When you mentioned the Blizzard of '78, it made me think, I've heard some things about different hurricanes that... because Providence, Fox Point is so close to the water. Did you ever experience any of those hurricanes?

Conaty: We did. I think it was Hurricane Carol in the '50s. Yeah, yeah. And then I can't recall the names. I'm not the best person to interview with remembering things, but there was some other hurricanes, too and I can remember like my husband, because he worked for the electric company, had to go, you know. So he might be gone for days at a time, not come home, because he'd be working such long hours, maybe he'd come home for four hours of sleep and then go back. But there were times when they actually would send them out of the state, to Massachusetts or Connecticut, where they had more damage, you know, they'd get crews from other towns and cities and so he would be gone for two and three days at a time. But, yeah, yeah, you know, we had some hurricanes. And actually if you talk to Lou, I think there's a picture of him in one of the hurricane books in deep water and it says, "Does this man need help?" or something like that. And my brother Lou went on to be a Navy Seal which I think is so funny! [Laughing] But he's in one of the hurricane books.

Schiff: What's a hurricane book?

Conaty: It's just a whole complete story of, pictures taken through the hurricane that they compiled. I have one from the Hurricane of '38 that an old friend just gave to me. But this hurricane was in the '50s and Lou's picture's in there. It shows him downtown and the water's like, you know, I don't know, maybe four or five feet deep and there he is with his head above water.

Schiff: Wow.

Conaty: Yeah.

Schiff: I know that a lot of the boys learned to swim at the Boys Club.

Conaty: Right.

Schiff: Did you get to... learn to swim?

Conaty: I don't swim, but I did go to the Boys Club. It was in high school where they'd have swim lessons and yeah, we went to the Boys Club. But to this day, I don't know why I still can't swim. I just don't have the buoyancy. I have the fat, not the buoyancy! [Laughing] But yeah you see you're bringing back memories. We did, we'd take swim lessons at the Boys Club, the girls.

Schiff: Just, they would close it, so it would just be the girls at that time?

Conaty: Yeah, yeah.

Schiff: To keep it private...

Conaty: Right. Yeah.

Schiff: When you were in high school?

Conaty: In high school.

Schiff: Did you ever go to the Boys Club for anything else?

Conaty: No that I recall. I see brothers of my pic... pictures of my brothers, but no, I don't recall going to the Boys Club. It was a wonderful outlet for them, though. You know, because, kids could have really, probably gotten in a lot of trouble, you know, with too much time on their hands. So it was a good outlet for them.

Schiff: [Pause]. And you mentioned the Portuguese American Social Club, that your father was a member.

Conaty: Yup, yup.

Schiff: Did your mother, do you remember anything your mother did?

Conaty: No. I'll tell you what my mom did. My mom took care of us. She took care of the house. She prayed a lot. She had her, her little prayer book, it was, by the time she passed away it was really quite worn. And so my mom was a stay at home mother and let me tell you, if I came home from school and she wasn't there, I was really ticked off. Because that's where she was supposed to be, but sometimes like on a day like today she would take what she would call a *biscote* [Portuguese word she pronounces "bishgirt"]. And a *biscote* is a biscuit and so that was a walk around the block and that's what she would do. She'd take a nice little walk around the

block... a *biscote*. Yeah [laughing]. But as far as like, you know, hobbies and things, no, no. She was very good about sending things to the old country, being Portugal, to the Azores, to people in need, whether it was clothing or... And I can remember one time somebody helped her, because she did sew, I think, more, she sewed more for my brothers when they were young. And she made this big beautiful flag with the Holy Spirit on it and she sent that to Portugal and, you know...

Schiff: To her relatives?

Conaty: Yeah, yeah. And they would use it in a fest, a festival out there. Yeah, yeah. But she was what you'd call a homemaker.

Schiff: Yeah.

Conaty: She cooked and she cleaned and she took care of the kids.

Schiff: Did she or any of your family ever go take a trip back to the Azores or to Brazil?

Conaty: No, no. It was very sad. However, after my mother passed away my father did go to Portugal with my brother Ernie. And I was so happy, because I mean, here was a man who worked so hard and so he did go. He went to, he went a few times to Portugal with my brother. And when Lou lived in California he went out there to visit them a few times and I had a picture of him under an orange tree and with his brown sweater on. And I love it because it was my dad. So I was happy because here was a man who worked so hard all his life and he lived about ten years or so after my mom died and he kind of like got to enjoy a few things, you know, trips. That was really good, yeah. But my, together they never did that. No.

Schiff: Do you know where they met here?

Conaty: No, I don't. But they got married at Holy Rosary Church. I have their wedding certificate at home.

Schiff: Really?

Conaty: Yeah, yeah.

Schiff: Is it in English?

Conaty: No, it's in Portuguese. It's in Portuguese. Father Rebello who later became Monsignor Rebello when he was at that parish for a long, long time.

Schiff: And how about you, you mentioned your brother who went to college, who went to Brown. Which brother was that?

Conaty: That was my brother Tony – he was the oldest. He, he was always smart. Actually he was very smart. Because not only was he good with his, with his head, he was smart, he was good with his hands, you know. Later on when he got married and had a family, he had a little lathe that he could make his own tools and everything. He was, you know. And my husband cannot do any of those things. If I see him pick up a screwdriver, I want to take a valium or something, because oh my god what is he going to do? But, Tony met this man Professor Damon. I don't know how he met him, but they became friends and he helped Tony get into, not that he had to help him get into Brown, but he kind of like maybe fostered that in him, that you know, "You're very smart, Tony, and maybe you should go to college." And because my parents didn't have any money, I recall that we can't do anything, but you could live here and you know you don't pay anything, but you don't have to pay board like the other boys, when they went to work had to pay board, you know... And he worked in the hardware store on Wickenden Street and he went to Brown. He graduated.

Schiff: What did he study?

Conaty: I couldn't tell you. I couldn't tell you. But then he went in the army. Became a second lieutenant. Married a wonderful girl from Massachusetts. And they had a family with four children.

Schiff: Where did they meet?

Conaty: I think they met square dancing. Yeah, I think they met square dancing, yeah, they did.

Schiff: Was she from the part of Massachusetts that's just right here?

Conaty: She was from, oh the fishing town... Gloucester, Massachusetts, yeah. And this Professor Damon had a house in Annisquam, right on the water. And it was an old, old musty house and you know, now that I think of it, we'd go there for a weekend. I don't know how we got there, it had to be with Tony. He had a car. And we'd actually stay there for the weekend. And now here's this man, you know, a Professor at Brown University and these two Portuguese immigrants you know, who speak broken English, but they got along well and Professor Damon and his wife had no children. My mom had them over for Thanksgiving, and you know.... Yeah, Yeah.

Schiff: So they were friends of your parents then?

Conaty: Yeah. They became friends of my parents. My father, my parents, you know, took, kind of like, you know, "We're having a holiday. Where's Professor Damon and his wife going?" So they came to our house. And they were very, very kind people, too. Very kind. So I was very happy, very proud of my brother, whose daughter is now an engineer in California.

And all his children have turned out well. Actually the whole family, we've all been very blessed that our children have turned out well. They're self supporting and no one's in prison.

Schiff: That's always good.

Conaty: Yeah [laughing]

Schiff: And so now you live in Smithfield?

Conaty: Now I live in Smithfield. In a condo, yes.

Schiff: What's it like there?

Conaty: It's wonderful, it's wonderful. I've been there ten years. It's a very nice place, because there's lot of grass, you know. So it's not just one. There's only two units in each building, so it's like a house almost. And I have a patio in the back and there's an old wall, an old New England wall, you know, just these rocks and stones and I'm fascinated with these New England walls. Like, "Who made that?" and why and when, you know, was it a boundary from your property to my property? And now I have some chipmunks living in there and I have a little garden in the front. It's very nice for older people. I'm 67, Bud's 68, or he will be. And it's all on one level and it's easy to care for and I just love it. Because that patio, I sit there all summer long and read. I love it, I love it.

Schiff: Sounds nice.

Conaty: Yeah, I feel like, I've come like, I call that my house in Newport. My mansion in Newport. From Fox Point to Smith Hill condo [she meant Smithfield], you know that's how I feel about it! I'm a house person and I love it there. And I have wonderful neighbors. And so I mean, you know, I have a good life, everything turned out wonderful.

Schiff: That's great. Good. Well, sounds like, I mean I think we've covered a lot, but is there anything else that you had, maybe you had thought before we were meeting anything you thought you'd want to talk about... Any good stories...

Conaty: No, I'll just, I can tell you that Evelyn married a boy who lived down the street from me in Fox Point, Tony. The funny thing is, all four of us [the four girlfriends], I think it's unusual today but none of us are divorced. And you know, we've been married, I've been married like forty six years. Evelyn's been married like forty eight, forty nine and none of us are divorced and I think that's quite something. I don't know if it was our upbringing or what. Not that things weren't rough at times, but...! We've weathered the storm, let's put it that way. It was a, a nice thing about Fox Point because everybody knew everybody. When I would walk wherever I was going, especially if I went around the corner of Brook and Wickenden Street,

there were always, there were bars on every corner, but “Oh! Here comes little Lou-Lou, Lou’s sister!” Yeah...

Schiff: That’s what they called you?

Conaty: Yeah, Little Lou Lou, because his nickname is Lou Lou, which I think is really not good, but yeah, Little Lou Lou, yeah, and so everybody knew everybody, you know. And there was no harm in walking by a whole group of men who were standing outside a barroom. You were not afraid. You knew everybody, they, if I didn’t know them they all knew my brothers, you know, so it was kind of a nice life. It was a real good life.

Schiff: Did your girlfriends have nicknames, too?

Conaty: Did they what?

Schiff: Did they have nicknames?

Conaty: No, no.

Schiff: Just you.

Conaty: Patricia was Pat and Judith was Judy and Evelyn was Evelyn, yeah, yeah

Schiff: So, you said none of you’ve gotten divorced and did they marry boys from the neighborhood?

Conaty: No, they didn’t. No. Judy’s husband comes from Bristol, very nice man. Pat’s husband comes from out of state. I think she met him in Newport. She went to Salve Regina and he was in the Navy. They live in Portsmouth now. And Evelyn lives in East Providence. Judy lives in Canton, Mass. But when I got, was diagnosed they all called, they came over one day went out to lunch. You know, I mean, so....

Schiff: Was there any expectation when you were growing up that you would marry a boy from the neighborhood or a Portuguese boy or anything in particular?

Conaty: Yeah, I think it would have been my parents probably always thought I would marry a Portuguese boy. I just never gave it too much thought, you know, even... But to this, I kid him to this day. Because you know when I get angry with him I’ll say, “I should have married a Portuguese guy.” But I love my husband dearly and no, it worked out good. But yeah there was kind of, because really that’s what you were surrounded with. If I had not gone to that school, to Hope, and met him, I don’t know... would I have met someone? But my parents were very strict about dating. I could not date, they were very, very strict. Very. So it just, you know, that’s what God had planned for me... to meet Bud and

Schiff: And, and when your parents met him you said it was, they didn't object in any way.

Conaty: No, they really didn't. You know, I mean, like you know, there was that thing like, "He's Irish." In other words, "Elaine, he's not Portuguese." But they liked him. He's a good person and they liked him. My brothers took to him immediately. In fact, he and Lou are extremely close, extremely close. I mean, if Lou said, "I need an arm." Bud would say, "Which one do you want?" and vice versa, really, that's how close they are. And so it makes me very happy. You know... So I mean as you can see, from Fox Point I've had a wonderful life. Wonderful sisters-in-law and great brothers and good parents, you know... Regrets, everybody, I have regrets, yeah. But it was what it was.

Schiff: But it seems nice that there were so many people that are close by still, you know?

Conaty: Yeah, yeah. Especially my sister-in-law Judy. I mean she's always been there for me. When I was diagnosed, I tend to forget now, last summer was the worst when I had to go through chemo and everything, but she would come over, she'd bring food, she'd cook a meal for us. She'd say, "Can I come over and do anything?" But I was fortunate enough to have someone come in and clean the house every two weeks, which was a big thing, because I'm anal about the house. To know that I wouldn't have to worry about that, that it'd be decent, you know... And my husband who's never done a thing in the house really tried tremendously, to do laundry, to do dishes, to make sure that I got my rest, you know... But like I say and Judy would come over and I can remember her changing my bed because I was just too tired and too weak to do it. And to this day she still does that. She was just sick recently. I don't like to cook, but I managed to get a meal together and brought it over there so she wouldn't have to do it. And kids today don't understand that, like sometimes my daughter will say, "What are you doing going to Auntie Judy's for?" "Well because Auntie Judy, you know, she needs a room to be cleaned and it's such a big room I can help her." I'm good with physical stuff, so... That's just the way it is, just the way it is.... You know. ...

Schiff: Yeah. Well I think that's all very interesting.

Conaty: I hope so.

Schiff: Yeah, definitely, is there any, anything else that you want to cover?

Conaty: No, I think I've covered just about everything. You brought back some nice memories about jumping off the garage into the leaves [laughing]....

Schiff: You know that I've heard stories of boys jumping off the bridge...

Conaty: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. See I didn't really know all that because I was so sheltered, really having four boys and a mother who did not let me go out too much... But I've heard things like my brother Lou jumping off the bridge and he wasn't supposed to do that! And so he tells me stories now and I go, "Oh my god." And I have had friends of his tell me, "Good thing Lou went in the Navy." Because he could have been a little hellion. [Laughing] He could have gotten in trouble, but I don't know I feel like there was somebody watching over us... You know, I met Bud, Tony went to Brown, Lou joined the Navy, he made a wonderful career, came out an electrician, you know... He married my girlfriend who is the best thing since apple pie or sliced bread.... It was, it was good....

Schiff: You feel like your family is particularly lucky?

Conaty: Well my husband says that and I'll say we're blessed. Yeah, we're blessed. Lucky is when you win the lottery... you know...

Schiff: Yeah.

Conaty: Yeah. When you win money and things like that, but I mean, We've, he's, Bud's always had good jobs, he's always had good health. My kids all turned out well, you know... I have grandchildren that are just absolutely , like you know, oh god... wonderful. It's, when you think you can't love anymore God sends you a grandchild and you cannot believe how much love you have for this child! [Laughing] So, it's good, it's a good life.

Schiff: Yeah...Okay, we'll I'm just going to press stop but we can keep chatting if you...