

Interview with **Mariana Rodrigues Gomes** on December 11, 2010

Interviewed by **Peggy Chang**

Fully transcribed on December 21, 2010

[**Note:** I met Mrs. Gomes through Arlene Sena, my colleague in the Dean of the College office at Brown. One of Arlene's parents and Mrs. Gomes are first cousins. Arlene was present for the interview. Before I turned on the recorder, the three of us spoke for about half an hour about the project and what I planned to ask. I needed to clear up their misunderstanding of the purpose of the project, which they thought focused on an agenda to illuminate a tension that existed between the Brown and Fox Point communities; I assured them that this was not the agenda, even though some interviewees spoke of their own experience with this tension. Arlene and Mrs. Gomes also wanted some clarification about the consent form before she signed it. During this period of time, I learned some things that I asked Mrs. Gomes to elaborate on during the interview.]

**Peggy Chang:** Hello, this is Peggy Chang; I am interviewing Mariana Rodrigues Gomes on December eleventh, two thousand and ten, at a little before five in the evening. I'm at her home in East Providence on 183 Wampanoag Trail in Riverside. So thank you for making the time to meet with me.

**Mariana Rodrigues Gomes:** You're welcome.

**Chang:** And I'm going to adjust this a little bit. Because I think the mic is a little strong. There. OK. Whoops. [-----] As I was introducing this project to you, I said that I basically wanted to just know a little bit more about your life in Fox Point. So I know you just filled out the biographical sheet, but can you tell me again when you moved to Fox Point, or when you lived there?

**Gomes:** When I came from my country, I landed in Fox Point. The first place I lived was Fox Point.

**Chang:** OK. And you moved there in nineteen fif—

**Gomes:** 1950.

**Chang:** OK. And you lived there, it says, you say for twenty-one years?

**Gomes:** Yes. In 1971 I moved to East Providence.

**Chang:** OK. And, did you live in the same place for that whole time?

**Gomes:** No. I stayed with my aunt for a little while on Ives Street. Then I moved to Governor Street. From the Governor Street I lived for a little while on John Street. Then 1954 we bought a house on Sheldon Street.

**Chang:** How old were you moved, or first came to Fox Point?

**Gomes:** Twenty-five years old.

**Chang:** Were you married?

**Gomes:** Yes.

**Chang:** You were.

**Gomes:** Yes, I was married.

**Chang:** So you were married in Cape Verde.

**Gomes:** Yes.

**Chang:** And then you moved here.

**Gomes:** Yes. Yes, and then my husband.

**Chang:** What was your husband's name?

**Gomes:** Abel.

**Chang:** Abel. Same as one of your sons.

**Gomes:** Yes. Yes.

**Chang:** Were your sons born here?

**Gomes:** Here. Yes. My first son was born in New Britain, Connecticut.

**Chang:** Oh.

**Gomes:** Yes, because my father used to work there. I stayed for a little while. Then I had my older son in New Britain, Connecticut.

**Chang:** Oh, OK. When you moved to the United States, did you speak English?

**Gomes:** No.

**Chang:** Not at all. OK. How did you, how was it those first few years when you lived in Fox Point, and—?

**Gomes:** Was, was easy for me because every place you go, so speak Portuguese. So I speak Portuguese. I understand. You go to church, Hol, Holy Rosary Church. It's Portuguese. So it was easy to get from over there.

**Chang:** And your three kids. Do your kids speak Portuguese?

**Gomes:** No. They understand. Yes. They speak Cape Verdean.

**Chang:** And your three kids, you were telling me before the interview started. Where did they go to school?

**Gomes:** Fox Point Elementary School. All three started over there. Then Nathan Bishop. Two graduated from Hope High School, and one graduated from La Salle Academy.

**Chang:** And you have two sons who live out of state?

**Gomes:** Now one is in California, the other is in Florida.

**Chang:** When did they leave Rhode Island?

**Gomes:** My young one went on a Coast Guard—

**Chang:** Oh!

**Gomes:** --after he graduated. I think it was 1975. The other one just decided to move to California. He went to college in San Diego, California. He stayed over there.

**Chang:** Do they both come back?

**Gomes:** Yes.

**Chang:** Often.

**Gomes:** Yes.

**Chang:** Often. They were just here for Thanksgiving.

**Gomes:** Yes. They try to come, you know, two-three times a year if they can. [. . .]

**Chang:** The twenty years or, twenty-one years that you lived in Fox Point, do you remember the neighborhood changing over time, or was it kind of the same—?

**Gomes:** Not much when I was there, it was the same when I moved, because I moved in 1971. It was the same.

**Chang:** So there was a big Cape Verdean community when you were growing up there, and Portuguese?

**Gomes:** Mostly Portuguese. Was a few Cape Verdean. I know could be a lot. But I don't know much, but. Mostly was Portuguese.

**Chang:** OK. And, uh—.

**Gomes:** Wonderful people.

**Chang:** OK. And was the church, the Holy Rosary Church, a big part of your life?

**Gomes:** Yes. Yes. My two sons baptized over there. They was altar boys over there. My older son's Baptized in San Francisco Church in East Providence.

**Chang:** I've seen some great pictures on the website of all the altar boys on the steps—

Gomes: Yeah.

**Chang:** --posing for a picture. So when you say you bought a house on Sheldon Street, did you mean your husband, and your three kids were—.

**Gomes:** Was two. One born on Sheldon Street. I have two. The young one born on Sheldon.

**Chang:** OK. I heard some of the people interviewed say, oh we all knew each other really well. We all just shopped in the neighborhood, we didn't have to go far, you could just walk—.

**Gomes:** That's true.

**Chang:** Yeah? Do you remember the names of the grocery stores you went to?

**Gomes:** [. . .] Joe's Market on Brook and Sheldon; Friends Market on Brook Street. There was a lot of different small ones. Was a lot of stores over there.

**Chang:** Given the fact you had three boys, were you the one doing the cooking? [Laughs.]

**Gomes:** No my husband was a good cook. Oh yeah. When he was home. He used to work in New York.

**Chang:** OK, So he was a good cook.

**Gomes:** Yeah. He used to work on a tug boat in New York City. So he travelled back and forth.

**Chang:** Oh, really?

**Gomes:** When he was home he used to do most of the cooking.

**Chang:** Really!

**Gomes:** Especially holidays.

**Chang:** I don't actually know what your food, what Cape Verdeans eat? Is it similar to Portuguese food?

**Gomes:** Oh yes. We eat all kinds of food, you know.

**Chang:** So, do you have like a paella, I don't even, can you tell me what your food is like? Is it rice and seafood, is it—?

**Gomes:** Rice and seafood and meat, all kinds of meat. Lasagna. All kinds.

**Chang:** OK. Your three boys, how far apart are they in age? Are they close in age?

**Gomes:** First one is two years older than second one. Then the other is four and a half older than the other one.

**Chang:** What was it like raising them in Fox Point?

**Gomes:** Very nice place to raise a kid. Very nice.

**Chang:** How so? How did they spend their time?

**Gomes:** After school you know they played in the neighborhood. They played on our street with the other kids. And there was a lot of kids on the street. They all get along good, they all played together. Get along very good.

**Chang:** They went to Hope and one La Salle. So did that meant they take the bus?

**Gomes:** No, I dropped them or they walking. No bus at that time.

**Chang:** No bus at that time. OK. Did they have good memories of high school? Because I guess high school is a little different, because you start meeting kids from different parts of the city.

**Gomes:** They don't, they don't talk much about that. So I don't know. They used to played ball, you know. Football with the kids.

**Chang:** I heard some people talk about there was a, a boys club?

**Gomes:** Yes. Oh yes. They used to go to boys club every afternoon after school. They go and swim, and. They go to camping. They do a lot of things at the boys club. It was a very nice place to drop your kids off.

**Chang:** I knew there was swimming, and what else did they do?

**Gomes:** Yes. Tell you the truth, I don't know what they do. But uh, [. . .] I used to drop them off and go pick it up. I have a lot of kids from the neighborhood to bring back.

**Chang:** Did you, have you been back to Cape Verde?

**Gomes:** No, no.

**Chang:** No, not at all. Why did you decide to move here in the first place?

**Gomes:** I just decided, you know, to move. Was no reason.

**Chang:** Was it, did you miss home in the beginning?

**Gomes:** What do you mean?

**Chang:** Miss Cape Verde.

**Gomes:** Oh yes. Because my mother was still there. But after my mother came. And my mother in-law, my sister in-law, everybody came.

**Chang:** Everyone came. Did they all live near you?

**Gomes:** They lived in Fox Point. My mother in-law and my sister in-law. My mother lived with me.

**Chang:** Hmm. Oh wow. OK. On Sheldon Street?

**Gomes:** Yes.

**Chang:** And your mother in-law, too?

**Gomes:** No. My mother in-law lived on Arnold Street. My sister in-law's house.

**Chang:** So, wow, in ways it felt like your whole family was here.

**Gomes:** Yes. Yes. Because I don't have no brother and sister but I'm by myself. My father died so my mother moved with me.

**Chang:** Before the interview started you said that many members of your family worked at Brown?

**Gomes:** Yes. My mother work in Brown, my uncle work in Brown, my husband work for a little while in Brown.

**Chang:** What did your husband do?

**Gomes:** Oh there was—Believe me, I don't know exactly what his was doing, but was in the kitchen. Must be a cook or something.

**Chang:** For the dining hall.

**Gomes:** Yes.

**Chang:** And your mom worked at Brown?

**Gomes:** Yes.

**Chang:** Oh wow. What did she do, do you know?

**Gomes:** Used to be Pembroke before? The girls' school?

**Chang:** Yes. The women's school.

**Gomes:** Yeah. Tell you the truth what she was doing I don't know.

**Chang:** But you never worked for Brown.

**Gomes:** No.

**Chang:** OK. [Laughs.] And when you decided to move to East Providence, why did you decide to leave Fox Point?

**Gomes:** Was no reason. I just, we decide, you know, to move. Because when I first came to this country, my sister in-law used to live over here in East Providence. I always wanted to live in East Providence. But we bought a house there, I lived there all those years. But I still have an idea to come back to East Providence. But was no reason. I have wonderful time in Fox Point, to bring my kids up, good friends.

**Chang:** Do you have any friends that still live there, or did—?

**Gomes:** No all of my friends is dead now or move different parts.

**Chang:** And when you think of that time, those twenty-one years you lived there, like if you have a picture in your head, what first most comes to mind? What do you see in your memory of that time? Was it the church, or the waterfront—?

**Gomes:** Yes, everything. Was nice place to bring your kids up. All the kids in the neighborhood, you know, I still have a memory of them for my kids. [-----] The house I have over there was very nice. Because it was old, old house. But was very nice. But I've been happy over here, too.

**Chang:** Your sons, are they still friends with people that they grew up with?

**Gomes:** Oh yes, oh yes. In fact, when my husband died, you know, most the kids they grow up, they showed up. It was very nice. They all showed up—the wake.

**Chang:** When did your husband pass away?

**Gomes:** Almost two years now.

**Chang:** Oh, OK. Still recent.

**Gomes:** Yes. February it will going to be three years.

**Chang:** Were your three sons, um, was one of them closer to your husband or were they all kind of equally--?

**Gomes:** Oh they were all equal. Yes.

**Chang:** Hmm. Yeah. Did, I'm assuming one of them spoke at the funeral, at the service?

**Gomes:** No, nobody did. They don't think about that. But they were all very close to their father. They miss him.

**Chang:** I'm sure. I'm sure.

**Gomes:** Especially Thanksgiving, they all want to come home. Because their father was used to do all the cooking and—.

**Chang:** Did he do all the cooking?

**Gomes:** Oh yes.

**Chang:** Really?

**Gomes:** Oh, yes. He used to do. He tried to make everything the kids like. And, so that's why they try to come home, just to remember.

**Chang:** Yeah. That's hard.

**Gomes:** It's not easy.

**Chang:** Right.

Did he make turkey?

**Gomes:** Yes.

**Chang:** He did!

**Gomes:** Oh yes. Big turkey. Big, you know.

**Chang:** And what kind of stuffing did he make?

**Gomes:** Regular stuffing. Now my younger one takes his father's place. And he's the one who wants to do the cooking.

**Chang:** Is he good cook?

**Gomes:** Yes.

**Chang:** Not as good?

**Gomes:** Pretty good. No, he done good.

**Chang:** Are any of your kids married? Do they have kids?

**Gomes:** Yes, they was married, then a divorced, but ah. One got two kids, other one, the young got one and he adopted one.

**Chang:** How many grandkids do you have?

**Gomes:** Four.

**Chang:** Four. How old are they?

**Gomes:** The oldest is 30, 28, 23.

**Chang:** OK. Your grandkids?

**Gomes:** Yes.

**Chang:** Oh my goodness! OK! Do you have great grandkids?

**Gomes:** Yeah.

**Chang:** You do! You have great grandkids?

**Gomes:** No great grandkids. Nobody have kids. Not yet.

**Chang:** Are your great, are your grandkids, do they identify as Cape Verdean? Do they feel that's part of their identity?

**Gomes:** Not much. Yes. They know their grandfather over there. But their, their mother/father were born here. So not much.

**Chang:** That's something I think about myself. You know, just, my parents were not born here. I was born here.

**Gomes:** Yes.

**Chang:** My husband is not Korean. But I have two kids. I just think about that a lot, are they going to feel Korean at all, or, you know.

**Gomes:** I don't think. Maybe a little. Two of my sons went to visit over there.

**Chang:** Oh.

**Gomes:** Yeah. And they liked it very much.

**Chang:** How old were they?

**Gomes:** Oh, I don't recall the age when they went. It was only three years ago they went over there. Fifties.

**Chang:** And you haven't been back at all?

**Gomes:** No, no.

**Chang:** Not at all.

**Gomes:** No. All of my family is dead you know. I don't have no desire.

**Chang:** I guess my last question is [-----] Are there, do you know if there are more people from Cape Verde coming even today to Rhode Island, or, I know that at the time there was a lot were coming.

**Gomes:** Oh yes, at that time there was a lot of people. But now I don't know.

**Chang:** I don't either.

**Gomes:** I don't have no family there anymore. It stills feels common. There's young people. I don't know much.

**Chang:** You came with your husband?

**Gomes:** Yeah, my husband came first, you know, seven months before me, then my, I came.

**Chang:** Oh, wow. Did you come by yourself, did you come with somebody else?

**Gomes:** No, I come by myself. 'Cause I, we got married you know. I all ready for my passport. I was wait for my passport to get over there. So I come seven months after him. I come through Lisbon. And I got my passport over there.

**Chang:** That must have been hard—

**Gomes:** Yes.

**Chang:** --being separated for seven months.

**Gomes:** Yes. It was hard. When I get to this country he used to work for Exxon. And there was the ship, the first trip he went was seven months away. He went to Europe and all those place. It take seven months to come back.

**Chang:** So you got here and then he left?

**Gomes:** Yes. I get here in March, and May so he left for a long trip.

**Chang:** That's sad.

**Gomes:** That's why I stay with my aunt. Then go back to New Britain, my father was there. Go back and forth.

**Chang:** And then you said he worked in New York?

**Gomes:** Then after that, he don't work for Exxon. After that he worked for tug boat in New York.

**Chang:** Got it.

**Gomes:** That was only two weeks over there. Come home for one week. Then started for a week, work for a week, then come home for a week.

**Chang:** Was that for many years?

**Gomes:** Yes.

**Chang:** That's hard too.

**Gomes:** Oh yes. Always on the boat. It's not easy. With the boys.

**Chang:** Hmm.

**Gomes:** That's why I have to learn how to drive take the boys to school, to boys club, to—

**Chang:** And when did he--

**Gomes:** --church.

**Chang:** Yes. When did your husband retire?

**Gomes:** Oh retire? Oh, twenty some years ago. 1984 or '85.

**Chang:** And your sons, what do they do for work? One you said one works for Channel 10.

**Gomes:** Yes. The other one works for a chemical company in San Diego, California. My young one was on the U.S. Coast Guard. He retired, now he works for some company in Florida.

**Chang:** In Florida.

**Gomes:** But he already retired from U.S. Coast Guard.

**Chang:** Great. Well, is there anything else I should have asked you that you want to share about your life at that time, in Fox Point?

**Gomes:** It was very nice. It was very nice over there. Good neighbors, good people, you know, from there.

**Chang:** Thank you. Thank you very much.

**Gomes:** You're welcome.

**Chang:** And uh—

**Gomes:** Nice to meet you.

**Chang:** It was very nice meeting you. I don't know if you and Arlene have any time on Thursday to come to our reception, but we're having a reception for everyone whom we interviewed.

**Gomes:** Is it night time?

**Chang:** It's a 2:00-4:00 pm. on Thursday. So I have the invitation there. You are more than welcome to come. We're going to do a little presentation, and a lot of the people that were interviewed will be there. So it would be nice to have you there.

**Gomes:** You say Tuesday or Thursday?

**[End Note:** After the interview officially ended, the three of us spent another half an hour talking. Mrs. Gomes said she couldn't come to the reception because of a dinner at her church. She asked me some questions about my work at Brown, when I moved to Rhode Island, and my family. She showed me a display case featuring her youngest son's medals from his time in the U.S. Coast Guard. And, we talked about current real estate prices in Fox Point. She said she bought her single-family house and two-family house on Sheldon Street (100 Sheldon Street, near Hope, I believe she said), for three or four thousand dollars. Recently she saw the house across the street from where she lived selling for \$500,000.

Mrs. Gomes's children who live out of state, Tony and Abel, had agreed to be interviewed over the phone, but it didn't work out. Arlene said that especially Tony would have a lot of stories about the Boys Club.]