

Fox Point Oral History Project

Interviewee: Al “Doc” Augusta

Interviewer: Emily Bryant

Location: Pawtucket, RI

Date: November 23, 2010

EB: Alright, well good morning. My name is Emily Bryant and I’m sitting with Al “Doc” Augusta in his classroom, well, a classroom, at Blackstone Charter Academy. It’s around 9:00am and it’s November 23rd, 2010 and as you know, the purpose of this interview is to learn about your experiences in Fox Point, and so, if at any time, you want to take a break or you feel uncomfortable, we can shut off the microphone and we also went through the release form and you signed that, and so you know that this interview will be archived in the Fox Point Oral History Project at Brown. Yeah?

AA: Yes.

EB: Ok, good. Alright, well, we’ll start. Just kind of for the record, if you could say where you lived in Fox Point and who you lived with, who you grew up with, in your household.

AA: Okay, I was born on the Ides of March, March 15, 1949, and I was born on the corner of Wickenden Street and Brook St. I was born way up on the fourth floor of a big house right on the corner there (it’s still there) and then my parents moved to 15 Sheldon Street, and I lived there until I was maybe four or five years, six years old and then we moved across the street to 24 Sheldon Street and I lived there until I was about twelve, and then we moved to East Transit Street. So I lived in three or four different places. I remember when we lived at 15 Sheldon Street, the rent was \$15 a month, and when we moved to 24 Sheldon Street, the rent went from \$15 to \$28 a month. It almost doubled. And even at \$28/month, my father, I remember he made a big deal about “wow, how are we going to afford this! The rent almost doubled!” At \$28/month...

EB: You don’t want to know what I pay for rent I guess. So what was the impetus for all these moves? Why did you move across the street? Do you know at the time?

AA: Yeah, 15 Sheldon Street—someone bought that house, it was a tenement house at the time, I lived on the first floor, and a friend of mine, Sonny Montran, lived on the second floor and then someone bought the house and made it a single family house, which it is today. So we had to move. And, we moved just down the street, across the street a little bit, and that’s why we moved from there. We moved from 24 Sheldon to East Transit Street because the landlord who owned the house on 24 Sheldon, who lived in East Providence, he sold that house. And again, someone bought that and made it a single family house. It had two tenements in it, but again, whoever bought it from the landlord made it a one tenement house, just one family lived there. So that’s why we moved to East Transit Street. So basically, we moved because we had to move for some reason.

EB: Does one of those houses, out of the places you lived, does one of those houses have more memories than another? Did you enjoy one of those locations more than another?

AA: Well I remember the one on 24 Sheldon Street was the one I remember a lot. That's when I was in elementary school, and I walked to school every morning on Wickenden Street, that's the one I remember a lot. I remember there was a fish market on the corner, and a big deal was to, for ten cents, to buy a crab to eat...you know, the crabs and the crab legs? I remember walking by that fish market all the time.

EB: On your way to school, you mean?

AA: Yeah, and on the way home.

EB: On the way home. What were some other sights and sounds you saw when you walked along Wickenden St, in those days?

[00:04:56]

AA: Well, I remember right on Wickenden Street, there were cobblestones, it was a cobblestone street, with the tracks in the middle, where the cable car used to run down Wickenden St. I remember that.

EB: Did you ever take the cable car?

AA: No, I never did, never did. And then I remember going up Sheldon Street, I would go down Wickenden and take a right onto Brook, and then go up Sheldon Street to my house. And on the corner, forever, and still there, was Friend's Market—that's Eileen Afonso's parents who owned that store; that's been there forever and ever and ever. But there were two or three neighborhood markets, because there were no supermarkets at the time, a lot of people didn't drive, my mother and father never drove, we never had a car, but there was, right across from Friend's Market, today it's like a liquor store, that was Joe's Market, and then on Wickenden Street, where the Indian restaurant is, was another market, that was Charlie Cuehlo's Market, so in the neighborhood there were three or four small stores that you brought your groceries from.

EB: So you didn't have to show loyalty to one or another? You could go to all of them?

AA: No, no! We went to most of them. And some of them, you could call your order in, like on a Saturday morning, my mother sometimes would call in the order, and then some kids would deliver the groceries to the house.

EB: That's like nowadays, they have Stop and Shop delivering groceries, you can go online, but I didn't know they were doing it back then too.

AA: Oh yeah, they did.

EB: Interesting. Alright, can you kind of, well I said it was November 23, 2010 today. Can you take me back to when you were in elementary school, say, and describe for me a typical day. So say November 23, back in...

AA: In elementary school?

EB: Yeah, the 1960s. What would a typical day look like for you? What did you do? Where did you go? Who did you hang out with?

[00:07:38]

AA: Well, in school—obviously, we went to school and the school, they had a big article in the Sunday paper, I remember, before it opened in September and they referred to it as the “millionaire’s school.” It was just a beautiful, beautiful school, state-of-the-art, unlike a lot of schools even today, that have like these multi-purpose rooms. The Fox Point Elementary School had a separate auditorium, with 250 or 300 seats, a separate cafeteria, a separate gymnasium and didn’t have everything in one room. In the middle of the school, it had this beautiful courtyard, that had all these beautiful shrubbery, landscaped and everything, and the classrooms had the closets where you hung your coats in the room, so everything was safe. There weren’t lockers out in the hallways where things could get stolen or anything, the rooms were large. Besides the windows, one whole wall above the windows were all glass bricks and also, a quarter of the way up on the opposite side were these glass bricks. So as far as brightness and a good feeling, you couldn’t beat that school. To this day, it is just a great school—the architecture of it, everything about it. So I have nothing... Then of course, I came back and taught there, I came back there in 1972, and became a teacher there for thirty years. When I came, when I first came, some of the teachers I had were still teachers there. As a matter of fact, the year before I started teaching there, in 1971, I did my student teaching there with Ms. Harkemian—who I had as a fourth-grade student. Of course, when I started teaching there, her and a few others were still there, four or five years before they eventually retired. So I actually came back and taught with some of the teachers I actually had at the school. And after-school, the thing I remember the most is going to the Fox Point Boy’s Club, which was on South Main Street, and going to the Fox Point Recreation Center. Back then, in the schools, in the public schools, the Providence Recreation Department had what they call ‘recreation centers’ that they would open in the schools in the afternoon. So like from 3-5pm, and 7-9, the school was open, the bottom corridor where the gym was and the cafeteria, and would play games and scatter and stuff in the cafeteria, because the tables went up into the wall, so that was just like a big open space, and of course in the gym, you’d play basketball or whatever, and out in the corridor there, they had a pool table, they had a ping-pong table, they had other things that you could do when you went to a recreation center. So that’s what I remember most of the time after-school: going to the recreation center, or to the Fox Point Boy’s Club.

EB: Okay, now did your school, did Fox Point Elementary do anything for its students after-school?

AA: That’s where the Fox Point Recreation Center was—

EB: Oh, I’m sorry.

AA: It was at Fox Point Elementary School.

EB: But it was run by this outside organization?

AA: Yeah, the Providence Recreation Department. As a matter of fact, years later I came back as a director of the Fox Point Recreation Center for about five years, I worked there when I was in college and stuff, like a part-time job, even I first started teaching, I also worked there part time.

EB: Did most of your classmates hang around to do that after-school stuff?

AA: Yeah, a lot of the kids in Fox Point, after school, would either go, like I said, to the Boy's Club or to the Fox Point Recreation Center.

EB: And was that because their parents were working and they didn't want to be home alone?

AA: A lot of them were working, yes. My parents always worked. I was a key...

EB: A latch-key?

AA: Yeah, a latch-key child. I always came home after-school and then went to the Club or to the recreation center. My parents came home about five o'clock.

EB: I don't think I asked what your parents did. Could you tell us?

[00:13:35]

AA: My father worked down the lumberyard, down Field's Point, off Allen's Avenue--he worked there for 35 years. My mother worked in jewelry shops, because there were a million of them in downtown Providence, Providence, Rhode Island was like the costume jewelry capital of the country, and there were a million different...and she worked in many of them. So that's what she did.

EB: Was she a well-dressed woman then?

AA: No, you didn't have to get dressed up to work at the jewelry shop! But she would put the jewelry on cards, and she was painter, she used to paint the costume jewelry, she had different jobs there. The thing I remember the most—I remember my mother and father, I think they both got paid on a Friday, and my father, for instance, let's say he made \$200/ a week and my mother maybe made \$40/week, and I remember on Thursday, or Friday morning, my father would ask my mother: "You got a couple of bucks that I can have for the coffee man?" And he'd be broke until he got paid that day; my mother still had ten or fifteen dollars left from the \$40! I remember, he always said to me, "it's not how much you make, it's how much you spend!" It was funny, my father made so much more than her (of course, he paid all the bills in the house), but one payday to the next, you're out of money. But she'd still have ten or fifteen dollars left out of \$40 and my father could never understand it. But I remember him telling me that one way—"it's not how much you make, it's how much you spend."

EB: Yeah, that's good advice! Was your family tight with money, or were they able to spend it on things for you, and do special things?

AA: Always did. I never felt like I went without. And when you think about it, when you think about \$15/month rent, when you think of a cold water flat, when you think of 24 Sheldon Street and East Transit Street, they had a bathtub and they had hot water, but neither one of them ever had a shower. But when you think of \$15/month, I mean, what's less than that? \$5? When you think of that, you realize that we were really poor, but we never, ever thought that. We never thought that we were poor! But when you look at it in retrospect, and you look back at it, and you think of the rent you paid, and you think of how you had no heat in the house except the heat from the kitchen stove and maybe a little space heater in the living room (in other words, there was no baseboard heat, or steam heat, or anything like that) a couple of stove heated the house, and when I remember 15 Sheldon Street, which didn't even have hot water, it was a cold water flat, and when you think of the rent, you realize, "hey I was poor!" But none of us ever thought that. We never realized that. We thought we had everything. So you don't miss what you don't have. We thought that everyone lived like this!

EB: Yeah, I was going to say, were there kids in the neighborhood you thought of as "oh, those were the rich kids," or "those were the really poor kids?"

AA: Nope.

EB: No. So you all were just in the same situation.

AA: We thought we all lived the same way. I didn't realize until later that there were people, you know, who had money and nice houses and cars and stuff, I didn't realize that until I got to Nathan Bishop on the East Side, when I went to middle school, junior high school. No, when I lived in Fox Point, through the elementary grade years, I thought we all were alike. But I never thought of us as being poor. That never crossed my mind. But when I think back about it now, I guess we were.

EB: So what were some of the special things your family would spend money on?

[a student enters the classroom and the recording is stopped for a minute]

EB: So yes, what are some special things your family spent money on?

[00:19:00]

AA: Ah, let's see...

EB: Did you travel? Did you go out to eat? Bowling? Movies?

AA: I remember meeting my mother downtown Providence when she got out of work, and I remember going out to eat with her—maybe once every couple of weeks. There was a Chinese

restaurant, Mee-Hong's, downtown that we used to go to a lot, and I would enjoy that. I would also enjoy downtown Providence at about this time of the year with all the Christmas decorations. Back then, we had a big department store, the Outlet Company, which was a lot like Macy's, where they had the windows decorated for Christmas and stuff like that—I remember that a lot. But I don't remember a lot of luxuries in the sense...first of all, we never had a car.

EB: Yeah, that was a question...

AA: Mom and Dad never drove.

EB: But you didn't take the cable car. So did you just walk everywhere? Is that how you got around?

AA: Yeah, I'd walk downtown, or take a bus.

EB: Okay, the bus, right.

AA: I'd walk downtown and meet her and then we would...like I said, I don't every remember them going out to eat at a restaurant, because like I said, they didn't drive. And that's about it. There wasn't a lot of luxuries.

EB: So did you learn to drive when you were of age?

AA: Yeah, actually, I did learn to drive and my father actually bought me a car when I was like sixteen or seventeen. I remember it was a Corvair—they don't even make that anymore.

EB: So when you were sixteen or seventeen and you had this car, this new freedom, where would you go with your friends? Where were the "cool" places to hang out in your adolescence? Did you try to leave Fox Point to get away from your parents? Did you stay in Fox Point?

AA: We kind of hung out in Fox Point, we hung out at Louis', up on Brook St? Louis'? Over near Brown? We used to hang there on the weekend nights, Friday and Saturday nights we hung up on Louie's. Never drove anywhere, never went anywhere like that, just basically stayed in Fox Point all the time.

EB: Can we talk about school a little? I was a teacher, so I'm very interested in that. So basically, I know you started as a student and went to being a teacher. So first I'll start with when you were a student. I guess this also ties in with your parents, in that, were they concerned about your education? Did they check in on you about school?

AA: Yes, they were.

EB: They did.

AA: Even though neither one of them graduated from high school. I think both of them maybe went to the ninth or tenth grade and then they, at that time, they were from big families, you quit school and then went to work to make money to help your parents, because there were five or six people in the house and so they had to chip in, they had to help out. So I don't think either one of them graduated from high school but they both pushed me and they both wanted me to do well in school?

EB: And was it the same for all your siblings?

AA: Just me.

EB: Oh, I'm sorry. Just you. So you were an only child?

AA: Yes, I am.

EB: Okay, sorry! Definitely then, they put all their eggs in one basket!

AA: Yup, they did. I was it—that was it!

EB: Yeah, alright! Can you describe a teacher at school you really liked, and maybe one you didn't like so much?

AA: In elementary?

EB: Yeah, in elementary school.

[00:23:25]

AA: I remember a Mr. Sorum. Mr. Sorum was the only male teacher at Fox Point Elementary School. He was very into nature. I remember when I came back to Fox Point and started teaching, I got very interested in him because he taught me the names of all the different kinds of shrubs that were in the courtyard at Fox Point School, he taught me about the birds, and the different kinds of birds, and he had bird feeders out there, and he would attract birds, and wildflowers, and weeds, and insects, and all that kind of stuff because he taught what was called, it's like Special Ed now, they called it the "ungraded" room back then, and with those kids that he had in his room, you had to do something that would turn those kids on. So he did it through nature, and I learned a lot from him. I learned a lot from him as far as, and even today, and when I taught, I used to teach the birds, I used to teach about the trees, and to this day, I see kids that I had, and they don't remember many lessons, but they remember the bird they reported on back in the third grade! So Mr. Sorum, I remember, I remember as a good teacher.

EB: As a good teacher, yeah, and he made an impression.

AA: Another teacher was my fifth grade teacher, Ms. Gavingen, and I what I remember about her was she had one arm, one arm, but boy she was tough, but she was fair. And I liked her a lot too. Can't think of any teachers I didn't like, you know, I didn't want to go to school, I didn't

want to go into class, I can't think of any I really didn't like but there were a few that I liked a lot. Ms. Carwell, there were a few I liked at Fox Point Elementary.

EB: Were most of the teachers from the neighborhood?

AA: Most of the teachers were Irish, Catholic, women. Miss McCaffery, Miss Gavingen, Miss McElroy, on and on, Miss Kelly, that's what most of them at that time were. And they all graduate from Rhode Island College, as did I, Rhode Island College back in the day was called RICE—Rhode Island College of Education, it was a big teacher's college, it still is, and so most of the people who taught school in Rhode Island went to Rhode Island College to become a teacher. And like I said, I remember at Fox Point Elementary School, a lot of Irish Catholic women, that's what I remember.

EB: And then Mr. Sorgum.

AA: Sorum!

EB: He was the odd one out.

AA: He was very odd, because he wore a sports coat and a bow tie every day. Very odd. Always remember that.

EB: That struck you as he was dressing fancy for school?

AA: Well, I mean, who wore bow ties then?

EB: That's true, I guess you're right.

AA: Who wears them now? So that struck me about him.

EB: Okay! So who were the students you went to school with? I know Fox Point had a very diverse population—Portuguese, Irish, Cape Verdean—I am assuming you were in school with all of these students.

[00:28:07]

AA: Most of the Irish Catholics, they were friends of mine, but most of them went to Cleary School, which is now the French American school, over near St. Joseph Church. They were members of St. Joseph's Church and they went to Cleary School. Most of the other kids in the neighborhood—the Portuguese, the Cape Verdean, whatever—went to Holy Rosary Church, and went to Fox Point Elementary School. So we went to two different schools in the neighborhood: the Catholic school and then the public school (Fox Point School). I went to school with the kids my age that lived in the neighborhood. And I still, we get together, we still see each other, a few times a year...

EB: Are they teachers, your friends? Or are you the only one...

AA: Yeah, one of them was, Dave DeSouza, good friend of mine, he's retired now, he lived right next door to me on East Transit St, he became a teacher, but three or four times a year, I call a bunch of guys, and other guys call, and we get together, like I said, at the Portuguese American Social Club in Sheldon Street. The first Friday in December, I guess its December 3rd this year, we all get together, we all go down the club and see each other and a couple other times during the year we have a cook-out at Al Mello's house in East Providence, he has a bunch of guys over. I have a bunch of guys over during the NFL draft, I have a draft party, I don't know if you know what that's about—

EB: Sure, I know!

AA: During the NFL draft, a bunch of guys come over and then we used to have a Fox Point Reunion that Steve Maycomber (sp?) and Diane, his wife, used to put together every three years at a big place, like Venus de Milo... where there would be like a thousand people come in, some would be from California, some would come from Las Vegas, all over the country. So Fox Point was always a place that when you were born and lived in Fox Point, it was a big part of your life. No matter where you moved to, or wherever you live, after—Cumberland, East Providence—you're always a Fox Pointer. Once you are a Fox Point, you are always a Fox Pointer. Like I live in Warwick now, but I don't know what they call Warwick people! Or, I lived in East Providence, I think they call them "townies"—I was never one of them people! I was always a Fox Pointer and I will be the rest of my life, no matter where I go. And like I said, I still go down on Friday nights to see the guys, you know, forever, and those guys still come down on Friday nights to see each other. I mean, after all these years, we still do this. We still get together and see each other every Friday night. I've got to go down there on Friday night—the week's not right if I don't go down there on Friday night.

EB: Will you have a bigger crowd this Friday because of Thanksgiving? Will more people be in town?

AA: Well, like I said, two weeks, on the 3rd, there will be a lot of people down there. But usually, we get the same, the regulars that come down there on Friday nights.

EB: Was your dad a part of that club as well?

AA: My dad was one of the guys that started the club in 1938.

EB: What do you know about that?

AA: I know that the same bar is there! And the same paneling, the same knotty pine paneling! And some of the same things that were there when he went there, are still there. The biggest thing I remember is the bar. It's the same bar that was there in 1938 when they started the club.

EB: Wow, that must be neat...all drink at the same bar across the generations...

AA: Another good friend of mine, Jimmy Ratigan, I see him every Friday night down there, and often we say, his father was a fireman—nickname was “Horse,” John Ratigan, and I remember on Friday nights he’d sit at that corner, and my father would be sitting right next to him, at that same corner of the bar, and he and I will sometimes will look and say “My father and your father would be right there!” And we’re sitting at the same bar. So I mean, that’s kind of...

EB: What did your dad like to drink? Did you order the same drink as him?

AA: No, he was having a couple of beers. It was tough not to go down, because we lived on Sheldon Street, like two houses from the club, so my dad would go down.

EB: What did your mom do while he was out? Did your mom have social activities with friends?

[00:34:41]

AA: No. What I remember doing every night, except Friday night when my father would go down the club, and he’d also go on Saturday afternoon, but all the other nights, I can’t remember doing anything but watching television with them. That’s all we did! We watched TV.

EB: What did you watch?

AA: All the old shows that were on at that time. That’s what we did. That was our family activity. We’d have supper, and then we’d go watch TV for the night.

EB: Would your homework be done by then?

AA: I would do it, I would do it during, while I was watching TV, I’d be doing it.

EB: Did you watch the local sports team while you were growing up?

AA: Yeah, Providence College basketball, we used to watch that because they televised some of those games back in the day. I enjoyed, we watched those games.

EB: Did anyone from the neighborhood ever go to Providence College? Was that a place people went?

AA: Yeah, a few went to PC. Rhode Island College was the only one I could afford. I only applied to Rhode Island College and Rhode Island Junior College at the time, because that was the only ones I could afford. I remember I got accepted into both, and I remember walking home from Hope High School, and I told my friend David, I said “Dave, I got accepted into both schools.” So he said “well, obviously, you’ve got to go to Rhode Island College.” I says “yeah, I want to go there.” I said “by the way, what are they noted for over there? What kind of school is that?” And he said, “aww, it’s a great teacher’s college over there,” and I said, “oh, well I guess I’ll be a teacher!” And that’s the truth. So I went there, and I majored in elementary education, and back in the day, the tuition was \$280/year and my mother and father didn’t have a dime. I

had to get what's called a National Defense student loan--\$350, and the other \$70 were for the books—you could buy all your books with \$70. I took that National Defense Student Loan for \$350, for four years. I remember when I graduated, I owed \$1400. My mother and father never had the \$300 for the tuition—I had to take that loan. So after I got the \$1400 note, I remember, because I taught in the inner city, in Providence, twice a year they would send me this form I had to fill out, and I would fill it out and they had to put the stamp of the school on it, and the principal had to sign it and fill it in, twice a year. And I remember getting it back, something in the mail back, about three weeks later, and it said “Mr. Augusta, your tuition has been reduced by ten percent, ten percent, ten percent.” This went on for about ten years! Finally, I get a letter and the letter said “Mr. Augusta, your tuition has been reduced for the final time. Please pay the remaining balance.” It was like \$28.14. And that's what I ended up paying for Rhode Island College: \$28.14. Because I taught in the inner city, they kept reducing it, reducing it, and then eventually...

EB: That's amazing.

AA: My father used to say, “that's all that education was worth!” Oh yeah, my father was the time, if the TV wasn't working: “You went to college, fix that!” I said, “Dad, no, it don't work like this.” But that's how he was.

EB: Yeah, okay. So lead me through this for a second. So you went to Rhode Island College, then you taught in inner city Providence?

AA: Fox Point School.

EB: Okay. That's where you taught right after you graduated?

AA: Yeah.

EB: And when you were a teacher there, first of all, what did you teach?

AA: Third grade, and fifth grade.

EB: Okay, and what were some of your favorite things to teach? Did you have a lesson you really enjoyed?

[00:39:55]

AA: I'm telling you—the nature stuff. I remember going to Blackstone Boulevard with like six envelopes and getting a leaf, like six leaves from one tree, putting a leaf in each envelope, maybe there were twenty-five different species, and I'd come back to the school with all the different leaves in the envelopes and I'd divide the kids into groups, and they would take all the leaves out and we had leaf identification books and they had to identify the leaves, the tree by the leaves, the seeds, and then I remember teaching about the birds, what birds don't fly, and this and that, and I remember that we culminated the activity by the kids choosing a bird to report on. I'm telling you, “I reported on the cardinal!” “I remember I reported on the blue jay when I was

in your class!” They remember that! But they are not going to remember the math lesson you did, but they remember the bird they reported on. I’ll tell you one thing that’s interesting. I had a kid, Anthony Rezendes his name was, so he was in the third grade with me, and we were doing these autobiographies, and they were writing about themselves. But to get them turned on to doing it, I talked to them about bottle messages, and sending things in bottles. By the way, I got in trouble with the DMV for doing this. I used to have them, they used to bring in these wine bottles with these corks, these big old wine bottles from these Portuguese families. So after they wrote the autobiography, and I corrected them and re-wrote them, we twirled them up and put them in the wine bottle, put the cork in there real tight, because when it went in the water it really swelled up and sealed well. We went over the pedestrian bridge that’s over there and we threw them into India Point, into the water at India Point. Now those bottles, they flow out to Narragansett Bay, and then out to the ocean. Two years later, Anthony Rezendes is in the fifth grade, he comes running into my room with a letter that someone wrote to him. This lady is walking on the beach in Cape Canaveral, Florida, and finds the bottle, opens the bottle, and writes back to the kid. The kid’s in the fifth grade now, this is two years later!

EB: Oh my gosh! No way.

AA: True story. It was in the newspaper and everything. Honestly.

EB: Oh gosh, he’ll remember that the rest of his life.

AA: Well, when I see him, he still mentions it! That was the only bottle that ever came back. But that was interesting. So I enjoyed doing things that were a little different in the classroom.

EB: Were there any challenges unique to teaching in Fox Point?

AA: Challenges. Not really. Except at that end there, I was teaching a lot of kids that I had their parents when they were kids. “You had my mother, you had my father!” I knew it was time to retire when they started saying “You had my grandmother!” When they started saying that, I said, I think it’s time to hang it up.

EB: Yeah, sure! Okay. Did they give you a big celebration when you retired?

AA: Yeah, they did. I still have things that they wrote, and it was a cool thing.

EB: Did the school ever host events that involved the neighborhood?

AA: Yeah, every spring we had what was called “Family Day.” It was on a Saturday, and the parents would come in, and we’d have sales, and we had shows that the kids put on, maybe in the gym they would do some kind of show...a play, they would have a play in the auditorium, and there’d be always something...there would be a lot of food, a flea market—people could buy stuff, plants, we also had artwork that the kids did that was framed and people could purchase. So I remember Family Day, that was a cool thing that we had every year. I remember that when the weather used to break, maybe about May. I used to like that.

EB: It also says that you went to Holy Rosary Church. What kind of events happened at that church?

AA: Oh gosh, what kind of events happened there? They would have the Christmas bazaar every year. And then, of course, they would have the Lady of Fatima feast in the summertime, where they would have all the Portuguese food, and they would march through the streets with the statue, so yeah, they had some events affiliated with the church, and the school, the school had a few things.

EB: Growing up, how familiar were you with Portuguese culture? How far back did your family go to Portugal? Were your parents Portuguese, from Portugal? Or your grandparents?

AA: My parents were born in America, actually. But their parents, both the mother and father, came from the Azores Islands. Not from the mainland Portugal—off the coast of Portugal, the Azore Islands. And I don't know, how many are there? I don't know if there are eight, or ten, or whatever, but one of them, St. Miguel, St. Michael, that was the island that my grandparents came from.

EB: So did you have a good sense of your family history? And did you practice Portuguese traditions?

[00:47:33]

AA: My [grand]parents passed away when I was very young so I don't remember them a lot. I have visions of them but it wasn't like they were alive when I was ten, eleven, twelve—where I could get to know them well. They passed away when I was four or five, so I don't remember a lot about my grandparents. I don't remember talking...the only thing I remember is one Sunday playing cards with my father's mother, my grandmother. That's about the only time I had any kind of interaction with my grandparents. Not much there. And like I said, I'm an only child. It was mostly just me, my mother and father. And most of the time, that's all I can remember is watching television with them. There were no other events I can remember.

EB: What would happen on Thanksgiving, say? Would you guys just celebrate the three of you?

AA: That's it. It would be just the three of us. We never went to aunts, or uncles or anything. I remember my mother, helping my mother, the Wednesday night, making the Portuguese stuffing and cleaning and preparing the turkey, but that's it. I remember the three of us eating Thanksgiving, just like any other day. Me and my father watching football all day. That's the only vision I get of that. It is what it was. I mean, that's it, that's all it was. Happy Thursday, never mind Happy Thanksgiving. It was no different from any other day. Sundays, I remember we always had a big roast. That was a tradition. I remember my mother always made a big roast every Sunday, whether it be roast pork, roast potatoes, and carrots and all that stuff, or whether it was a boiled dinner, or roast beef, or meatloaf, but there was always a big roast every Sunday, big Sunday dinner.

EB: And she'd buy that at one of the markets?

AA: Yeah, right. She'd buy the piece of meat from one of the markets right down the street.

EB: Did your dad have a specialty that he cooked? Or do you?

AA: Nope. My mother, she made great omelets. I remember her omelets were incredible. And I still don't know how she could flip that omelet around, over...never break it or anything...and I remember her making omelets and frying fish...fillet of sole... and making these French fries that I used to love. There were four or five things she made that I loved. Rice with linguica—that's like a Portuguese sausage...there were a few dishes, baked beans...there were a few dishes I used to look forward to, yes.

EB: How were your lunches at school? Did you pack a lunch? Did you get lunch there?

AA: Toasted tuna and a Twinkie. For ten years. I wouldn't eat those hot lunches in school, no. That's all I remember. Toasted tuna and Twinkies. Maybe on a good day I'd have the Hostess Cupcakes instead of the Twinkies.

EB: So when you decided to become a teacher, was that a respected decision? Did you feel that when you were teaching there that people looked up to teachers? Nowadays, there are all these disparaging remarks about teachers...

[00:51:53]

AA: Oh yeah, the Portuguese people did look up to teachers. Matter of fact, they never interfered with you educating their child. They felt that you were the expert. They weren't like some parents today, at school every day, telling you how to teach their kid. No, the Portuguese parents, they never got involved with that. And as a teacher, that was a good thing that I didn't have to deal with some of the parents that some of my friends had to deal with that taught in other places. I never had that problem. No, they never interfered and they were very respectful of the teachers.

EB: Was it easier then to have class management and good behavior in class?

AA: I never had trouble with that.

EB: You don't seem like you would. When I was a teacher, I did...

AA: I don't know why. I never had a problem with that.

EB: Here's a question. When you were in school—elementary, middle, high---did you feel challenged by your teachers? Do you feel they had high expectations of you?

AA: Yes, because I was like the only kid from Fox Point in my class that was on the college track, which I don't agree with. Because the teachers in high school, they actually determined

your life. And a lot of the kids from Fox Point that were in my class, we're talking like fourth grade, fifth grade, sixth grade, junior high school—not many, if any, were in any of my classes. I was on a college track, and most of the kids, and I used to be upset about it, with any of my friends, most of the kids, a lot of Jewish kids from the East Side of Providence that went to Hope, I was in classes with them. That was the college track. It worked out wonderfully for me, because I ended up going to college and becoming a professional, but I often think of all the other kids that someone decided “they are not going to go on a college track.” So in a way, they determined the outcome of your life. And I don't agree with that. I didn't agree with that then, and I don't agree with it now. But that's the way it was. As far as the expectations, yeah, they had high expectations of me, because I was with all the other kids and they high expectations of everyone who was in that college track back then.

EB: Was there a general attitude that people from Fox Point shouldn't be going to college?

AA: Kind of, kind of!

EB: We had heard that from some of these men who came and talked to our class, that their teachers, you know, “you're from Fox Point...” Yeah, that's really interesting how that perception....

AA: Yeah. Not many of my friends who went to elementary school ended up in the “college track,” and therefore, they never went to college. A handful of guys that I went to Fox Point School with graduated from high school and went to college. I'm talking a handful—maybe five or six—tops! But there were hundreds of kids. They never went.

EB: Do you think it was determined by your personality? By your grades? At what point were you “tracked?”

AA: Who knows? Who knows what they did to determine whether you should go on to college or not. If you should be in the college track or not. But you know what? There may be a lot of truth to what those guys said. “Oh, he's from Fox Point? He ain't going to college.”

EB: Did you ever experience that attitude in other places? Did you ever feel you were discriminated against?

AA: I never was!

EB: True

AA: But a lot of them were. I was just lucky, my grades were good in elementary and I was in group one, the eagles... I was just lucky. In junior high school, I always had good grades, honor report cards, all As and Bs—that was back then, I don't know what it is now, maybe you need all A+s now, who knows, but back then, if you got all As and Bs, you got honor report card. I had an honor report card every semester when I was at Nathan Bishop, so maybe that determined why they put me on the college track when I got to Hope High School but I can't believe that

everybody else from Fox Point had lousy grades in junior high school. Some of them must have had decent grades. I don't know.

EB: I don't know, I don't know. Did you go on field trips in school?

AA: When I was a teacher, or when I was a student?

EB: Both, either. You can answer that for either.

[00:57:56]

AA: The only one I remember is going to that Philharmonic, and I hated that! I used to take the day off then. I hated that Philharmonic! You still couldn't give me any tickets to go see that! But I mean, I remember that was a trip that all the kids went to in Providence, they went to the Philharmonic. Other than that, I don't remember a whole lot of field trips, to be honest with you.

EB: What kind of music did you like listening to, if not classical?

AA: Me? Rhythm and blues. Soul music. I still to this day, still to this day.

EB: I saw the Isley Brothers recently-errr- a few years ago.

AA: Get out!

EB: Yeah, it was awesome.

AA: One of my favorite groups of all time! Ronnie Isley?

EB: Yeah, and he's out of jail now so they're going to come back.

AA: Yeah, he just got out. He was in for about a year for not paying his taxes.

EB: Exactly.

AA: Ronnie Isley. I love him. And how 'bout the one that plays the guitar...is it Leon, or...

EB: Ernie?

AA: *[hits table]* Ernie! Oh, can that Ernie play or what? The Isley Brothers are one of my all-time favorites. Woohoo! Howard Melvin and the Blue Notes...

EB: Is that the kind of music they'd play in bars and stuff in Fox Point, when you went out?

AA: All night! On Friday night. The Celtics games are on, we mute the TVs, and we play the music all night long. I still listen to it. I still listen to it. Donny Hathaway, you know, all the...There was a couple of groups from Fox Point, from the Fox Point/East Side area. Jeffery

Osbourne, I went to Hope High School with him, I don't know if you remember that, "On the Wings of Love," he's been in California for years. And then the group Tavares? You know, "Heaven Must be Missing an Angel..."

EB: These were groups that hit the big time? Really, and they were from Fox Point?

AA: Yeah, Tavares Brothers. Matter of fact, talking about Fox Point School, I remember in the week before Christmas vacation, the Tavares Brothers would go around to every classroom when I was a kid at Fox Point School, and they would sing a Christmas carol in each class. I remember them going around to each classroom. Yeah, Tavares became a big time group.

EB: Oh, well I will look them up on iTunes or Youtube. Okay, I like that kind of music. [*writes down names*]

AA: Yup, Jeffery Osbourne. He went to Hope, he was in my class at Hope High School. Yeah, check out both of them.

EB: So how we doing on time? You said you had a meeting with a student?

AA: Yeah, at 10:30. What time is it?

EB: I'm not sure. It's 10:15.

AA: Yeah, at 10:30 I have a kid. 10:36 actually.

EB: Okay, so maybe just a few more questions?

AA: Sure. Alright, we got a good twenty minutes.

EB: So you say you go back to the neighborhood on Fridays now, and meet your friends and stuff, and when you return and go back to the neighborhood, what strikes you as having changed?

AA: When I go back?

EB: From when you grew up

[01:02:00]

AA: From Fox Point, we had the mentality that Fox Point was an inner city neighborhood. So when we got older and got married, we 'quote' wanted to go to the suburbs. So people moved and bought houses in Warwick, Cranston, North Providence, East Providence, okay? So, we left Fox Point. Now, there ain't none of us that could afford to go back into Fox Point!

EB: Yeah, that's what I've heard. It's so expensive now.

AA: That's right. Now none of us can afford to go back in there. We can't buy a house back in there, now. We should have stayed when we were there. Big mistake. Big mistake.

EB: This can lead into a conversation about your relationship with Brown, when you maybe a teacher or a student. Did you ever work with Brown University students or staff?

AA: Didn't they change the name of the school after the president?

EB: They did. What's your opinion on that?

AA: There's no opinion. What's my opinion? You don't want to go there.

EB: Yes, it's named Vartan Gregorian now.

AA: Oh, I used to drive the secretaries crazy. I'd have a break, at Fox Point School, the phone would ring, I'd go over and pick up the phone and say "Fox Point Elementary School!" And they get mad, "no you can't do that!" and I used to answer the phone like that. I will never call it whatever it is. That is Fox Point Elementary School, that will always be Fox Point School to me. I don't care what name they put up there, it's always Fox Point and if you ask anybody that you interview, they'll tell you the same thing. That's Fox Point School. You give a little money, and your name can go on the school? That doesn't make it that name. It's still Fox Point School to me.

EB: Sure, sure. So, when you were a teacher, did you have student teachers from Brown working at Fox Point Elementary? Did you...

AA: They, Brown, the athletic department adopted a classroom, and the men's hockey team adopted my classroom and I got to be good friends with the hockey coach at Brown...he left, I forgot his name now, he left and went and coached up in New Hampshire or something, but he was a great guy, Bob? Began with a "G," he was the coach over there and we had a good relationship. I had a good relationship with Brown and the sports teams. It never worked out exactly the way I would have liked it to work. In other words, the team, the team players for each team, women's or men's team, that adopted a certain class, I thought that the kids should have come in more often from that team and worked in that class and mentoring or tutoring kids, helping them with math or whatever. I never saw a lot of that. I don't think the kids spent a lot of time coming to the classrooms that their sport had adopted. Once in a while, a hockey player would come in and work with a kid, but never to the extent that I...in other words, the concept was good, but it could have been better. I don't know if they still have that though. I don't know if that collaborative is still going on. You'd have to find out, I don't know. You could ask the Athletic Department. And then, they used to have a big dinner, and they used to invite us to bring, I think we had to bring one student, and I remember going up there in the springtime to this athletic dinner at Brown, so the kids were invited, some of the kids were invited, that was cool. I don't have a problem, I don't have a problem with Brown.

EB: So when did you retire from Fox Point School?

AA: 1999.

EB: Do you think the students that go there now have a good understanding of the neighborhood and what it means to be from Fox Point and all those identity things?

AA: How many are from Fox Point?

EB: Well, I don't know. You're right, because that school now attracts other people.

AA: I tell you, most of the people, there are very few 'quote' Fox Point kids that go there. And if... let me see if I can explain this. If some kid, third-grader, whose parents live in a fancy house over on East Street, say. If that kid comes to Fox Point School, that family is not a Fox Point family, it's probably from... somewhere. So as far as Fox Point families, there is no more Fox Point families. Who still lives in Fox Point? And if they live in Fox Point still, and they've been there for the last fifty years, they are my age—they don't have any kids going there. So I don't know if there is any 'quote'...there's still probably Fox Point kids that go, but the parents are not the old Fox Pointers. I'm not making myself clear.

EB: No, I understand what you are saying. It's just become more the name of a location rather than maybe an identity. "I'm from Fox Point," that's what it's about, now it's just "I live there." It's a place, but not a mentality. I think that's what you are getting at.

AA: Exactly. It means nothing to them—it meant a lot to us. It still does.

EB: And you touched on this before, but why is that identity so important to you, to say you are from Fox Point? Is that something you can verbalize?

[01:09:15]

AA: It's like anything else, like part of a club, or part of a group. You know, "I play for the Yankees," I come from Fox Point. It's just a part for who you are, part of you. So, it's always a big deal, Fox Pointer. That you were born and brought up in Fox Point.

EB: Well, I'll pick one more question to end with...so I'll end with, and I kind of asked you about this before, so our class project this semester is we are doing a walking audio tour of Wickenden Street, so I had asked what you remember about Wickenden Street, and I'm just wondering...

AA: The biggest thing is the cable car and the cobblestone street. All the way down Wickenden. And the cable car that used to travel on the tracks. That's the street itself. But if you want me to tell you like, there were other places there, like barrooms, Manny Almeida's Ringside Lounge, Babe's on the Sunny Side, and a lot of, Ray Felice Liquor Store, and Charlie Cuehlo's Market, and where that painting store was, on the corner there, Utrecht or something, that used to be Dudley Hardware Store, for years and years, that was a hardware store, Dudley's Hardware, and right next to it used to be the old fire station, it's an empty lot now, behind the church, there's an

old church on Sheldon St. and the back of it is an empty lot, that used to be fire station over there.

EB: Were you friends with the firefighters and the policemen and stuff in town?

AA: Well, one of my best friends, Jimmy Ratigan, I see him every Friday night down the club, he was the chief of the fire department, Providence, for about ten years. And he was a fireman, and I told you his father, “Horsey,” he was a firefighter too.

EB: Oh! I just thought...I have to ask you this before we end, I’m sorry to cut you off. And I asked you this on the phone, and you said it would take a whole interview to explain this, but can you just try to summarize your nickname “Doc?”

AA: Why you gotta go there?!

EB: “Horsey” is a very interesting nickname as well, “Doc”...as far as I know, you’re not a doctor, so is there a quick summary....

AA: It’s really not complicated. Really. We had a softball team—

EB: In Fox Point?

AA: Yeah. We had a softball team for years, and one of the best softball pitchers in the state was this Doc Calise, he was a podiatrist, a foot doctor. So I was the pitcher on the team, so they all started calling me Doc, because of the other Doc, so that’s basically how I became Doc, because of that famous softball pitcher.

EB: And you were the pitcher for your team?

AA: I was the pitcher, too. Yeah. It really isn’t a very interesting story—

EB: No! I didn’t know you had talent in softball.

AA: Well, for a few years I enjoyed playing softball.

EB: Who did you play against? Other neighborhood leagues?

[01:13:46]

AA: I played for the Fox Point Social Club. And that’s a whole other story. Make that story real quick: Way down near the Fox Point hurricane dam, where all those fancy clubs are, the Hot Club, the Fish Company and all that. Twenty years ago there was nothing there but a big old garage. And on the corner, where those condominiums are, there was a place called the New England Butt Company. I think...I don’t know what they made there. Anyway, the Fox Point Social Club used to be on Sheldon Street, on the corner, almost on the corner of Benefit and Sheldon. Somebody bought it and converted it into a house—it’s a house right now. So we had

to find another place, so Eddie Xavier, who was the councilman, talked to the guy down there and he said “you can have...you can come down here and make the club, but you’ll have to convert the club, I mean the garage into a club.” So we built the club in that garage. Paid a dollar a year—that was the rent. We were there until New England Butt sold, and then we had to leave there. But the Fox Point Social Club—there are stories there I could go on and on and on. To make a long story short, there was no one there but us. The Fox Point Social Club, which was this big, big converted garage, and there was the hurricane dam, and nothing else was around there. Nothing. So we were there by ourselves. That was a great place. They had the best jukebox in the world, we had great times, and that was the softball team I played for—Fox Point Social Club. All the guys, we put a team together. But that’s another story.

EB: This is when you were...what age were you approximately?

AA: Late twenties, early thirties.

EB: So what did you build in the actual building?

AA: Couple of bathrooms, a kitchen, a big long bar, bunch of tables and chairs in a big, big shell. It was a garage. That was the greatest place in the world. Oh man. It’s knocked down now. It’s not even there. It’s a lot there now. We were right across, where the lot is, across from the Hot Club, in that block (lot?) there, that was the club, and then the hurricane dam, and there were no other buildings around. Nothing. New England Butt would close at 5:00 and there was nobody down there but us. Ah, greatest place in the world.

EB: Was it open for anyone? Or did you have to invite people in?

AA: Anybody could come. It was a membership club, we had meetings and everything.

EB: Were you an officer?

AA: No, I wasn’t an officer, I was just a member.

EB: Who played bartender? Did you guys hire

AA: Oh, we had different bartenders. I remember we had a 25-Week Club party down there. Oh gosh...

EB: What was that?

AA: I think back then, you put, everybody put a dollar a week, you paid a dollar a week, and every Friday night they drew a number, and if your number was drawn, you won \$25. Now, of course they brought in a whole lot more than \$25, everybody put in a buck. All the rest of the money would go into a kitty, and we’d have this big, big party at the end—food, groups coming to sing, it was incredible. Oh, the 25-Week Club parties down there, man...woo, they were great.

EB: Thank you for sharing your memories. Is there anything else you want to share at this point? It sounds like there's a lot more we could talk about.

AA: If you ever want to come back another time, that's fine with me. Not like I'm going anywhere. It was a pleasure speaking with you, you're a very good interviewer by the way—you might have a future in this.

EB: [*laughing skeptically*] Well, we'll see. Thank you. I'll turn this off.