



Jessica De Costa

Interviewer:

All right, so this is Emily Reinl. I'm here in the media lab on February 24th, 2023 with Jessica. So go ahead and introduce yourself.

Jessica:

Hi, my name is Jessica De Costa and I am a native of New Bedford, Massachusetts all my life. And I'm telling the story about my ancestors. I will begin with my grandmother. Her name was Rosa Posa Almeida. She was a homemaker. My grandfather was Antonio Furtado Almeida. And when he came to this country, I believed he worked in factories. Whatever you could find, this is what he did to support his family. Both of them did not speak English, which I find amazing. And they had five children. Maria, Hilda, Celia, Celia, which was my mother and Olive. They were all born in America. The last one, she was not able to come to this country in time. So my uncle Joseph, was born in the Azores, Povazan. It was called the Village Povazan. So they came to this country in a boat. They didn't have airplanes back then, so I found out.

And they struggled in those days because my grandmother stayed home to take care of the five children. And my grandfather somehow, somehow found work with help. I believe he had cousins here already in this country. So I found out that it was very hard for them at the beginning because they were all small, five children. And I remember my mother telling me that they struggled even to live in a house because they could not afford the rent. Even back then. They went from house to house to house. And a lot of those houses were on.... What was the name of the street? There I go with my mind.

Interviewer:

That's okay.

Jessica:

I can't remember the name of the street, unfortunately. And even back then the rent was very small, but they couldn't afford it. All my aunts and uncle didn't, how can I say, not graduated, but finished school only to the age of 16, because they had to leave to support the family, unfortunately.

So the last house that they lived in, which I still live in all my life, is on 608 South Second Street. I have lived there all my life. I am now 74. This is the only home I've known all my life. And we lived on the second floor, the whole gang of us in four bedrooms. I remember one bedroom was my uncle, another bedroom was my grandmother, plus my mother and I in a twin bed. We were one head on this side, one head onto that side to fit into the twin bed. The next bedroom would've been my aunt and her husband, and then the next bedroom would be my other aunt with my cousin Rita. So we all lived in that second floor room. Before then, I remember my family telling me when my grandfather passed away, they couldn't even go to a funeral home. So they had to wake or whatever in the parlor of the house. I found that very interesting too.

Nelson Street. That's where they live, house to house on the other. And my mother would point, "This is where we lived until we got to south second." The rent was very cheap back then. I think it was maybe two or three dollars a week. Okay. I went to two elementary schools in the South end. One was the Benjamin and the other one was Ingraham, which is still there now. Ingraham is a low income. Benjamin is gone. They made into a Polish church, which I attended. And I forgot to tell you, my family was very religious, a very Catholic religious family, which I adored. I really enjoyed all that and I'm thankful that I was given that opportunity to keep with my religion. And they kept their religion until they died, which is awesome, I think. So I went to those two schools.



My grandfather passed before I was born. He just missed it by a couple of months. So my mother wasn't even able to tell him she was pregnant. So then when my grandmother passed away, my grandmother, Rosa, I was at the age that I could drive. I went to New Bedford High School. I graduated from New Bedford High School, and I remember still to this day, I had the car. I'm coming home from high school, and I remember looking at St. Luke's Hospital. I'm thinking, "I wish I could see her."

But back then, back in the sixties, you were only allowed in if you was 18 years old, and I was only 17, and boy did my heartbreak when I couldn't even see her. Nope, you're not of age, you can't go in. So at least she had my family there with her. I think my aunt and my mother was with her.

And then, like I said, she passed away. Then slowly but surely, everybody else passed away. They all died of cancer one way or another, died of cancer. So going back in time in this house that I still live... I got to tell you this one. On the third floor was my Aunt Hilda and her husband on the third floor. It was first, second, and two doubles on the third. Okay. Whatever they call that. Right. So they lived there, those two. And then the rest of the house was on the second floor.

Unfortunately, my aunt and her husband moved out. They got bought a whole house of their own. That was my aunt Hilda and her husband. So they had a house with their own. My uncle Joseph, lived with us until he married, and he married very late in his thirties. And then he moved out.

And then when the apartment came available, my mother and I, we moved up to the third floor where my aunt and uncle had left. So we moved up there and the second floor got smaller. Like I said, my grandmother passed away. So what was left on the first floor was my Aunt Mary and my Aunt Olive. Unfortunately, my Aunt Mary, I never called her Mary. It was Maria. She passed away. So the only person left on the second floor was my Aunt Olive. And at that time I was a CNA, a certified nurse's aide. So I was able to take care of her, and I did take care of her until the day she died. I was with her.

So then when she passed away, we offered the apartment to a cousin. But that's a whole different story. I don't even want to go in there. But what I want to mention also is I have lived in all four apartments. It was like a cycle. First was the second floor, then I moved up to the third floor with my mother, and then... If I can get this right. Then I got married and the third floor apartment got empty because I guess they knew we were married. So they moved out and I moved across from my mother and I was married at that time.

Then I got a divorce on unfortunately, and I stayed there with my baby girl. I had a baby girl, Rosanne. And then we heard the people on the first floor was move out. I'm like, okay. Her and I, big apartment, four bedrooms and all this.

We moved down to the first floor. So it was her and I. And on the second it was my aunt, and my mother still living on the third floor. And then we got married, da, da, da. Then my mother, unfortunately was not able anymore to take care of herself on the third floor. And at this time, I had moved down to... Yeah, I was on the first floor. No second floor. So I renovated the room that my aunt passed away a little while ago for her to come to live with me on the second floor.

And here I go. I'm getting a little mixed up here, A little mixed up. Forget that one. Third down to the first floor. And I renovated one of the rooms for her on the first floor until unfortunately she had dementia. And I took care of her as long as I could.

And unfortunately she was getting little where it was hard to take care of her, even though I was a CNA. They always say, sometimes harder to take care of your own family than it is when you're in a nursing home or assisted living, which I did work assisted living. So unfortunately I had to put her into assisted living. And she passed away at St. Luke's Hospital, which was very unexpected. Very unexpected.

So now, in the meantime, my daughter was going to get married and she says to me, "Ma, you have to move on the second floor." I'm like, "Why? Really? Why?" "I can't do the steps, Ma. But you can."

So there I go from the first, back to my original place on the second floor. This is really different, back to the same bedroom where I was with my mother and my grandmother. It's like deja vu. It was really something.



So there I am again, still on the second floor. My daughter is now in the first floor with her daughter. So just the three of us on in that whole big house. I won't rent the two top floors. My mother's stuff is still there. It's been 10 years. But it is so hard to throw some of those things away. The furniture and all that. It's still there. It's still there. I'll go back. My education in New Bedford... Oh, I'll go back to my mother's family's education. I'm going back and forth. They all went to the Duvall School. Okay. And like I said, unfortunately they all had to leave when they were 16 so they could help with the family situation.

And I always remember my mother saying she was the brightest one in the family. And I'm saying, "Why ma?" She used to tell me, "Because I take after your grandfather." My grandfather, her father was much more smarter than her mother. I took after my father. Not my...

Unbelievable. Okay. Alrighty. I said, "Okay." So in Duvall school, she always told me too that she was the smartest one in the family. All the kids that were at Duvall School, and her teacher at the time, I still remember her name was Ms. Chase. And she told me that "Ms. Chase did not want me to leave. She wanted me to stay and go on." I remember her staying there and she said, but she couldn't because again, the family economy and all to help support the family. My grandmother never worked. She took care of the children.

I'm like, okay. But this is so funny. As life goes on, I remember I didn't tell you I worked in the office first. When I graduated from high school, I worked in the office. I did graduate in the business course. I worked in the mills, but as a payroll clerk. So I take the payroll and now I do all that. And after that kind of ended, because we had the recession. We had the recession. And unfortunately after all the time I was there, I got laid off.

Interviewer:

What recession was this?

Jessica:

1960 something I believe it was? I think it was in the sixties. Yeah. I think it was in the sixties.

Interviewer:

Just trying to place it in time. And yeah, another time in question, do you know approximately when it was that your mother's family came over here?

Jessica:

Like I said, my mother and grandmother came back and forth, but I believe it was in the thirties.

Interviewer:

In the thirties, okay.

Jessica:

Yeah. I think I have it there. I see the number. 1931. One was 1925.

Interviewer:

Okay. Just trying to, yeah, establish a timeframe.

Jessica:

It was early at that timeframe. So where was I?



Interviewer:

Sorry. The recession.

Jessica:

Yes. So I looked for another job because nobody was hiring. Nobody. The only thing I could find was in a sweat shop. I forgot to mention, my family did work in the sweat shops. All the girls, but I'm not sure about my uncle. But they all worked in the south end, nothing. Wherever they could find a job, that's where they were. And my mother did not want me to do that. She wanted me to graduate from high school, even though I wanted to quit high school to help her. And she said, "No, you're going to get an education in." And I did graduate from high school. And going back to the teacher, Ms. Chase. I was at the nursing home, sacred heart, nursing home. I was there almost 10 years. Had a lady come in. Ms. Chase.

I'm like, really? Well, naturally I went to introduce myself. You always do that when you have your patient. And I introduced myself and I said, "Ms. Chase?" She said, "Yes I am Ms. Chase." I said, "Was you a school teacher?" "Oh, yes I was." Very prim and proper. "Oh yes, I was." I said, "You had my mother." And she looked at me and she said, "What was her name?" I says, "It was Celia." I could see her thinking it was years. Yeah. She said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I don't remember." I said, "Well, I remember your name and my mother never forgot your name and you did not want her to quit school." And so I got home. I told my mother, I said, "Mom, Ms. Chase." She said, "What?" I said, "Yeah, Ms. Chase is at the nursing home. You want to go see her?" "No." I thought if that was me, I would've gone.

So again, that's one of the things that I wanted to talk about was the education, how they struggled with one income coming until they got all the five children working. But still, they worked and worked all their lives. Very hard workers in the sweatshops. They all did stitching, except my uncle. I think he worked in some kind of factory, but not with a stitching department. And they worked very hard.

In those days they called piece work, standard pay. My mother was piece work to make the money. And the funny thing about that was I never realized how much money my mother saved. Came to the point where the landlord was going to sell the house. And my mother somehow asked him, "How much do you want for the house?" And he says, I still remember this, "\$18,000." And she said, "Okay," she says, "I'll buy the house from you if you put in hot water."

We were the only house in my small block, I think it's like only six houses, everybody had hot water. We were still warming water on top of the stove to take us baths. We didn't have no showers. We had no showers. It was always the bathtub, bathtub, bathtub. And he said, "Okay, sure." So he put the pipes in, blah, blah, blah, blah. And as soon as everything was all settled, my mother said, "\$18,000?" He said, "Yes." Signed the papers. She bought that three decker for \$18,000 in cash.

When you think about it, where did she get that money? She saved and she saved all by herself. But I'm sure what helped too was we were all one family. But I'm sure maybe she helped with the rent, a little rent. And back in that time, the rent was \$3. Can you believe it?

Three dollars. Then I went to five. And I remember the last time when my mother charged rent, the last one that moved out, it was \$30. And that was not too long ago. Not too long. When I came in, I always paid my mother rent. I did not want to take advantage of her. Even back then, it was only \$30 a week. So when you think about that, whoa. Nobody would do that nowadays. No. Unfortunately, things have gotten so much higher.

So in my life, unfortunately, I was a single mother too. Unfortunately, it didn't work out. And I raised my daughter in my tenement, we called them tenements back then, her and I, and was able to afford to bring her to Catholic school because I wanted to her to get a religious education. And I thought it was a better school than what was in my neighborhood.

Back then I think it was the Gomes School. And I did not want her to go to the Gomes school. And she graduated from the Catholic school with very excellent grades, excellent grades. She was at the top of her class. And now I



have my granddaughter, my Sarah. So it's just the three of us. And the house is almost the same. I think the only thing new in that house is the showers. It's the showers. There's showers on first floor and second floor. And the third floor is not, like I said, it's not being rented as is. It's history of its own.

And that's what they did. One of my aunts never worked. She took care of my grandmother. Oh, I forgot to tell you this. My grandmother had a shock, a stroke, in the same bedroom that I'm in now. And they could not afford a hospital. They couldn't afford a nursing home. So what did we do as a family? As a whole family, we took care of my grandmother at home for six years.

We were lucky at that time. They rented a hospital bed back then crank and crank it for a dollar a month. It was some kind of organization, I forgot what it was. And all we had to do was pay them a dollar a month for the hospital bed. I took care of her the little that I could, back then it was the grownups that would wash her. But what I did love to do was wash her face and comb her hair. I still remember wash her face. And I used to feed her because with the stroke she was weak. But otherwise, my family would take over. And I was with her last day until she went into the hospital with a second stroke.

And that's what got her, was that second one. And she passed away back in, I think it was 65, because I graduated at 66. And I remember having the car. And I got the car in 65 going by, and she passed away. I think it was 65. So did I say enough or do you want to know any more?

Interviewer:

This has been wonderful. So you brought these travel documents. Would you maybe like to describe what you brought? We won't be able to see it on the recording, but do you want to talk about them a little bit?

Jessica:

Sure. What I found was the passport for, let me see. I want to make sure I got the right one. This is the passport for my uncle Joseph. My uncle Joseph. He was born in the old country. My grandmother did not have enough time or money to come here to have him born here. So he's the only child that is born in the old country.

But when he did come here, naturally, he got his citizenship paper. I forgot to mention he did get his citizen's paper. So he was a citizen of the United States, and he did service in World War II. Yes. I forgot to mention that. He was in Europe with the army. He was in the Army and he did get wounded. So he got, it was a star or something like that. Yeah, because he got wounded. And so he used to serve this country, which I think was just awesome.

But he would never talk about it. I think it was very bad for him to talk about it because I believe something really happened. And I remember as a child, they told me, don't talk about it. Don't talk anything about the service in the war. I said, no. So we never did. Kept quiet. My cousin and I lived together at that house and we never mentioned it.

So this is my grandmother's passport. Like I said, it has a lot of different dates here. And it says she's from Povazan. Yeah, San Miguel, ISOS, and it says here how tall she is. The color of her eyes, the color of her hair. I think it says also how old she was and that she was a domestic. She worked at house, so she didn't work out in the fields or anything like that.

And this is my uncle, my uncle Joseph. I believe he was six years old when he came here. And I forgot to mention, I think when she had the other children, they all stayed in the old country because I don't think she would've bring all four of them here. So they were all left there. And she had came here to have the other four.

Interviewer:

And it was just because she wanted them to have us citizenship? That was why?



Jessica:

Yes. Oh yes, definitely. Yes. And they did get it, except my poor uncle. It was a little bit too late. And this one here, I believe is a passport for my grandfather, Antonio Furtado Almeida. This is his passport. And again, all the information, what he did there that he was married to Rosa. And that's his picture here when he came here. Antonio Furtado Almeida. And the color of the eyes and the hair and where he was born and stuff like that. And that's that actually.

Interviewer:

Great. Thank you so much.

Jessica:

You're welcome.

Interviewer:

Any final things you want to say before I stop the recording?

Jessica:

Yeah, yeah, I do. I just want to say that my family, I have to do this. I have to honor my family. They were very law abiding people. I mean, I don't remember anybody getting any tickets, that I can remember, for anything. Didn't steal, anything like that. Like I said, they were very religious people and they loved coming to this country. And they did say that they were very happy to be here. And lucky that they were able to come here after having five children. And she made that, I believe, a sacrifice or whatever, to get them to America to live here in this country.

Because in the old country it was very, very difficult. It was like poverty. So they knew what poverty was like, and they wanted them to have a better country, a better life in this country. I remember one little story too, that they were so poor. Like I said, my grandfather would try to work any place he went. And in one story my mother told me that he went down the cape. I think it was about Falmouth, around there. He had cousins.

And he went there one year for anything that he could do to support the family. He went into the fields to pick strawberries. And my mother said they were so poor, they had maybe a room or someplace they lived. All the children were in one bed. All five children in one bed to keep warm. So it must have been maybe in the fall or the early spring. And I found that really amazing on his part and my grandmother's part to keep going so they wouldn't stop.

And they were very independent. That's another thing I want to say. They were very independent. They didn't depend on anybody for this or this or that. But they did look for bargains. We would go to bargain sales and stuff like that. And they would go to a store. And then back then the stores, not there, but at South Hartman, they would give them credit. Papers, papers. And they would pay, I guess, as the money came in. And they always paid the bills.

Except for that rent, because I believe because the children were too young, so they didn't have the extra income to pay for the rent. So when they were told to evict, they went to another house on Nelson Street. And then I guess when the children got older, they had that money, so they weren't evicted. And the last house they were was at 608 South second Street in New Bedford.

And I've seen a lot in my age in that street. I've seen a lot. Some nice and some not too nice. I remember the riots, when they had the riots, the police station was right on Cole Street. And I remember my aunt and I and my mother being on the third floor, watching the cops coming down Second Street because they were having fires on First Street or Front Street.

And we could see the smoke. And we stayed out there, believe it or not, till three o'clock in the morning because



we didn't want our house to get burned down. We were afraid. We were frightened.

Interviewer:

How old were you then?

Jessica:

Oh my God. I think the riots were back in the sixties, I believe. Yeah, I think I was sixties or early seventies. So I was young. I was young. And like I said, I stayed up until three o'clock. My mother and my aunt went back to bed. But then I remember the cops coming back down the street to go into the police station and they had rifles. That's how serious it was.

And so that was a scary moment living in that area. I told people, I've seen the good, the bad, and the ugly. And the ugly is right now, at this time of my life, in my neighborhood, it's not, well, it's not doing good. It's not good.

And I remember back then everybody had porches. I forgot to mention, everybody had porches. We had the clothes lines. We would put our clothes on the line. So what would you see? Diapers. That was so funny. Diapers. And certain times of the year, we would do our curtains all by hand. And we'd do our curtains and you would see the curtains.

And back then too, it was men's underwear. So you would see the men's underwear, all white hanging on the line. I thought that was so funny. Everything's gone now. Nobody has clothes lines. It's all gone. The poles are gone. So that's gone. A lot of porches are gone. They get decayed. And the landlords actually all different landlords nowadays, they just tear them down. I still have my porch. One of my neighbors still has her porch.

And I'm just lucky to have the porch is still there. But it's not in good condition. But I inherited the house. I've got tell you, I inherited the house from my mother. I'm an only child. I forgot to mention that. And she left the house to me. And thank God while she was living, she didn't have any problems with the house.

But now the house is getting old. So there's a lot of things to be fixed. And it's come to a point where I'm just letting some things go until they tell me I have to tear down the porch. The back porch is not in good condition. But that's another story. So yeah. Is there anything else you want to add or anything?

Interviewer:

I think this has been great. I really appreciate you sharing your family's story with us. So thank you so much.

Jessica:

You're welcome.