



Jasmine Duncan and Ann O'Leary

Interviewer:

All right, so this is Emily Reinl. I'm here in the media lab with Ann and Jazzy who are going to tell us a family story. The date is January 20th, 2023. So I'll turn it over to you two.

Ann O'Leary:

Thank you, Emily. So my name is Ann O'Leary and formally Ann Rodricks. That was my maiden name. I was the youngest of three girls. And college was very much a first generation to all go to college and graduate school and eventually... Library or the school libraries of New Bedford for over 40 years. So growing up in the south end of New Bedford on Orchard Street, we were... 14 years older than I, and even the youngest of the generation. So I would hear stories of my cousins and sisters talking about how my mom... And yet all the pictures... Only the discrepancy between how many children my grandparents had. My cousins and my sisters knew that, thought anyway, that there were seven children. But my mom would always just acknowledge the six and there was no, there were no pictures of that side of the family growing up. So there was always... Changed my mother about it.

But I did have a cousin who was closer to me in age than my sisters who told me one day that, "We do have an aunt. Her name was Lydia. She left Orchard Street." Where we lived. "She left the family home when she was 20 and she never came back." And we would just keep questioning that. And eventually the story was that she married a man whose last name was Ramis and he was Cape Verdean and mom... We were all sad about that and my oldest sister would say, "Well, why don't we just find her?" And so we found out some things. We found out that my mother was actually 10 when Lydia left the house. And we also found out that she perhaps came back one day and knocked on the door, but they didn't accept her back. So that was it.

Now my sisters tried to find her, but she... We, Lydia DeMelo, but she changed her name. We found out later to Eva and she even changed her last name. So although she stayed in New Bedford and raised children and as Eva Ramis, we just didn't, did not know that she had changed her name. So knowing that though, we just kept living our lives. And in 2021, my oldest sister who's in her eighties said to me, "I still can't believe that we have never-" "... For over 40 years." She told me, "How do you not know that last name Ramos? How does that name not come up? And how did you never meet Lydia?" And I'm like, "I don't know Louise Ann. I don't know how we never met Lydia." And then something happened on April 16th, 2021.

Jasmine Duncan:

Hi, my name is Jasmine Duncan. I am a senior at Bishop Stang High School and I am Lydia/Eva's great-great granddaughter. I have always been interested in this... Known and heard about Ann's side of the family, but I, being a child just understood they were separated. There was no contact, but we knew they were in New Bedford. We knew they existed, but just never met anyone in person. And then one day, throughout the year prior, so 2020, I had actually looked at Ann's mother, Louise's obituary online and just looking and looking at her children. I see Helena, who is the only one my family knew about. I see her sister Louise Ann, and then I see Ann O'Leary. "I'm like, I know that her as my school's librarian, am I sure is this real? I'm not sure." And I waited a good year, maybe 10 months, to actually confront her in 2021 because I had no clue what it... How that would go.

So that day, April 16th, the courage was building up in me to do so. And I went one day after school to the library and asked if first of all she had ever heard of the surname Ramis. And I remember you of, yeah, "Hi, there's many in New Bedford." And then I had brought up a picture of my great-grandparents who my great-grandfather's last name, and my mother. And of course, "Yeah, I know of them. Yes." So I, in short term say the whole story of I am the second great-granddaughter of Eva and I believe you are my relative, you are my cousin. And I just remember



you bursting into tears of, "I didn't know how to respond of what am I, is this good? I'm not sure how to react." But I just do remember that whole rest of that information that we could share to try to figure out and share each part of our information. And since then we have, well, my side, including myself, my parents and my grandmother is Ann and her siblings, first cousins who they had never met. So my side of the family has a lot of siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, there's a whole bunch of them. So there was many relatives in my side of the family. We had, I believe over the summer of 2021, tried to get those first cousins of my side to meet Ann and her sisters.

Ann O'Leary:

And a tropical storm came.

Jasmine Duncan:

So it just happened to be, we're going to persevere through anything. And we did make that happen the summer of 2021 and having Ann herself and her sister... Brother, he's the only one still living out of her siblings and out of her, sorry, out her children. My accident, the only one living out of her children. And I remember him saying throughout his life, he has never known first cousins. So this was a very prominent moment of him, of his. And though my grandmother and her cousins have, it was just a very great connection the day to have. And it will forever be remembered as me what sophomore into junior year making this type of discovery that I try to be humble about it. My family members of Jasmine did this, Jasmine did that. I'm not the person of center of attention, but I am very glad and happy that what I thought was so innocent, just looking across obituaries as a 16 year old girl.

Ann O'Leary:

During Covid, right?

Jasmine Duncan:

During Covid. Was... The discoveries I know of today. Yeah, yeah.

Ann O'Leary:

And we had a reunion in that summer of 2021 at Bishop Stang the place where-

Jasmine Duncan:

Our common.

Ann O'Leary:

Yes. A common ground. Bishop Stang high School Library. And then we had picture to my mother and her sisters is unbelievable. And it was just great. It really was great. And then we were planning another reunion and then there was a tropical storm and then also there was a resurgence of Covid. So-

Jasmine Duncan:

That's on hold.

Ann O'Leary:

That's on hold. However, I do see Jazzy every day at Bishop Stang and she's a senior, so I'm trying to-

Jasmine Duncan:

Inch closer.



Ann O'Leary:

Yeah, I'm trying to make these precious moments... The story and I mean, can't know why my grandparents did what they did. I can't speak for them and I've even spoken to Jazzy and her mom about this. But we can do the right thing now. And luckily my daughter and Jazzy who are in their twenties and late teens have actually met each other probably more than any of other family members. So... connection and I don't know why people disown people. I'm the Emily Borne research fellow for the Whale Museum's project Lighting the Way. And I know that Quakers disowned people when there was tension between religious views. I guess disowning is a historical thing, but it definitely impacted us and it definitely took family members from us and we just, my daughter and Jazz.

Jasmine Duncan:

It's a very surreal thing, especially as now as Ann said, I'm a senior, so college is in the upcoming future. And when doing my college essay, I had written about all this and as a very unique thing. Hopefully that's my way into some of these schools. But I really tried to focus it around, like Ann said, it's not, we're fixing the future with that sense of disownment. But in the great-granddaughter of her daughter Dorothy and I did get to know her in her late stages of life and my mom was the closest to her. So I always hear stories from my mom of what Dorothy would talk about her mother. And Dorothy was the oldest, so she had the closest timeframe of the disownment in a way. So just knowing her mother's emotions and just how she lived life was really... In the city of New Bedford. So somewhat big and so diverse that she probably had many a times crossed by her own siblings and maybe acknowledged, didn't acknowledge we have at this point, no way to say so, but at least I have a hope that she did know they still cared. And from our point of view now with knowing Ann and in her side of the family bond that was broken now over a hundred years ago. So I'm trying to keep pushing it forward.

Interviewer:

What an amazing story.

Jasmine Duncan:

Yeah.

Ann O'Leary:

I know.

Interviewer:

And you should be very proud of having made that discovery.

Ann O'Leary:

Oh my goodness, yes. And she wants to continue that work majoring in history in college.

Jasmine Duncan:

Correct. I deciphered down to social cultural anthropology for my college major or if other schools just have anthropology, I focus on one culture of, because I'm learning, my family is very diverse, both with my mom's side but also my dad's side of it's not just one race or ethnicity. I kind of want to focus on just the broad subject of how cultures impact how people live their lives.

Interviewer:

Very cool.



Jasmine Duncan:

And truly, I can understand with this Portuguese side of my culture that maybe if it was that [inaudible 00:11:31] with Cape Verdean that at that time zone in that timeframe, they just weren't accepting for their reasons and just to see now in our world today, some still aren't and some are. And as I said, the diversity of New Bedford. So I just want to work to keep that pushing so that never goes extinct in a way. So that connection is never-

Interviewer:

...Sharing this. Are there any, so you talked about the family reunion. Are there any other photos here that you want to talk about a little bit before you wrap up?

Jasmine Duncan:

I'd say at least this one as this is the photo of Eva and her husband Joe Ramis. I don't remember the date of circa around, but it lists their six children at the time they had it as I believe a total of eight. This is my great-grandmother Dorth. We also have Josephine, Alfred, Kenny, Blanche, and Norman, as you can tell with the photo, even with it being black and white, my family jokingly calls it the Skittles, the rainbow of skin tones. As maybe right or wrong, that can me. But because of the mixed heritage of Portuguese and Cape Verdean, my great-grandmother was the darkest and... Two of them bonded over, they had the closest skin tone to match in quite opposite to their mother. The siblings in between, they mixed. Some were dark in their own times, light in other times, but the group of them you could really tell... You would not be able to tell their brothers and sisters. Some really don't acknowledge that today even. So, it is our family to know that families aren't cookie cutter, they're not all the same. They are certainly an interesting bunch. So yeah, that has to be.

Interviewer:

And whose wedding photo is this?

Ann O'Leary:

Yes, that is my grandparents' wedding photo 1901. So that was the wedding photo of Manuel DeMelo and Jacinta Broom. And they were married at St. John the Baptist Church in New Bedford in 1901. They had... And those are the parents of Eva, and they ended up having seven children. That's their wedding photo. And the other important photos would be the ones of Eva herself and then also the reunion that we had at Bishop Stang library. So these pictures kind of span the beginning with the marriage of Manuel and Jacinta. And then we never had pictures of Eva so-

Jasmine Duncan:

I had the pictures of Eva, though I had heard and talked about Eva my whole life, I'd never known the names or even a painted photo of her parents.

Interviewer:

So you both sides have gained something now?

Jasmine Duncan:

Yes.

Ann O'Leary:

Right.



Jasmine Duncan:

And it's weird to see that I have known my whole life that she had had been disowned from her parents and now looking at the faces of her parents, I don't, at least myself... Or just feelings back as again a hundred years ago. You can't take in their feelings of the past and why I am so wanting to move forward for the future because obviously a hundred years ago never meeting them, they I bet we're just great people in general. I would never know. So no holding grudges and just appreciate and just being able to it. I don't know many people who can identify, at least for myself, those are my third great grandparents, so that's crazy. But yeah.

Ann O'Leary:

And I am so grateful and my sisters and cousins are so grateful that Jazzy found us. She made the link between the name Eva Susan Ramis, and Lydia-

Jasmine Duncan:

That we didn't know.

Ann O'Leary:

...And she made that link.

Jasmine Duncan:

That one part of Lydia. It was actually one of the census records that are available with Ancestry.com that I had been able to see the list of Ann's aunts and uncles of her mother, all the names that we knew. And then I see Lydia about the same age and range of Eva. I'm like, hmm, I'm not sure. Is there another sibling, another person we don't know about. And it kind of corresponded... Merged to becoming Lydia DeMelo merged into becoming Eva Susan, gradually. So that was our newfound shock.

Ann O'Leary:

Yes.

Jasmine Duncan:

That it's with some of this information you have to tread lightly with some members of my family, my uncle Sonny Alfred, who is 93, turning 94 in the next week or so. I believe. He, unfortunately he does not remember that I have called and reached out to him. I just want to make sure and let him know that it's okay now. Again, as his mother went through this and as a child that here in the future, it's all okay. It's been made better. We're moving forward and I hope that has resonated with him, as my uncle Lenny is able to pass that on to my cousins and move forward. He can move forward. For The past two years now and now almost three for this upcoming April. I had no clue this, I called it hobby of being 11, doing all this and now here we are. I would never have imagined that.

Interviewer:

That. Wow. That's great. That's great. So probably want to wrap up the story soon. Any final thoughts you want to add before we wrap it up?

Jasmine Duncan:

I'm okay. That was a lot.



Interviewer:

... with another reunion soon.

Ann O'Leary:

Oh, thank you so much.

Jasmine Duncan:

We hope so too.

Ann O'Leary:

Thank you.

Interviewer:

That's great. Thank you.