



Marilyn Gonsalves

Interviewer:

All right, so we are recording. I'm here with Marilyn who's going to tell us a story, so go ahead, Marilyn.

Marilyn:

Okay. This is a story about Albert O. Lopes, better known as Al Lopes. He was a gentleman, athlete and musician, and he was my father. Al Lopes the athlete was described by the New Bedford Standard Times as an outstanding Cape Verdean American athlete, an excellent basketball player who inspired leadership as a captain of the New Bedford High School basketball team during 1935 and 1936, and on the Cape Verdean Wheelers basketball team.

His brilliant career was shortened when he had to leave school because of family circumstances beyond his control. In his freshman year at Roosevelt Junior High School, Al Lopes was already playing with the New Bedford High School varsity basketball team, which was coached by a well-respected gentleman by the name of Winn Dodge. Coach Dodge took a personal interest in Al while he was playing for Coach Ramsey at Roosevelt Junior High School.

When Al graduated from junior high, because of the financial struggle at home, with his older brother Frank carrying most of the load, Al knew it would be very difficult for him to go on to high school. However, because of his strong interest Coach Dodge had in Al, and his height, six foot three inches tall, he talked Al into trying to convince his brother and mother to allow him to go on to high school.

As the story goes, Al went home and spoke to his brother Frank, and pleaded with him to allow him to attend New Bedford High School for just one year. His brother Frank went along with it, and Al went on to establish himself as one of the all-time great athletes ever to play at New Bedford High School.

During his sophomore year, Al was chosen captain of the varsity basketball team, which won the all-conference title. At the end of the 1936 season, he was selected to the All Bristol County team, and was singled out by the Standard Times for his athletic prowess and leadership ability in its Hats Off column.

There was very little question regarding Al's athletic ability. The thing that Coach Dodge liked most about Al was his natural ability to lead. He took a genuine interest in Al, and even promised him a scholarship to Brown University if he were able to stick it out and complete high school. As much as Al would have loved to stay in school and shine on both the basketball court and the football field, it just wasn't to be, as things were really tough at home. He quit school in March 1936 and immediately went out and got himself a job at Aerovox.

For Al to quit school, just when everything seemed to be going very well for him, was a real agonizing and painful decision, but one he quickly accepted as something he had to do, and hence went about the task of helping to provide for the family.

Through all the difficulty Al experienced, he maintained his pride and self-respect, and began taking an interest in music, first as a spectator watching the old timers play at the Madison Square Garden, located on the corner of Water and Madison Streets every Saturday night, and later as a musician himself.

Al organized his first band in 1941. Thanks to the encouragement of Boy Rogers, he is remembered for his legacy to the Cape Verdean community in general. He brought joy to so many young and old, through his special music talent and his amenable style as a band leader. He was one of the pioneers in Creole band music and as a promoter of the Creole dance era for the first generation Cape Verdean Americans.

His recordings, which began in 1945, were played and appreciated from the East to the West Coast. Alan has been traveled extensively by car across country to California to perform and entertain many Cape Verdean families. He successfully owned in New Bedford, the first Cape Verdean record shop. Al was responsible in a way



for awakening interest in our heritage through his interpretation of the Morna, the Mazurka, the Valsa and Polka. His music during and right after the World War II years brought Cape Verdeans together in moments of memory and nostalgia and transcendence. Because of his impeccable manner and his spirit of musical creativity, he continued to dominate the scene with a musical career spanning 35 years. His lifelong interest in Cape Verdean music, his devotion to it through the years and his unwavering commitment to express his heritage commanded wide appreciation.

Al also worked as a forklift operator for the International Longshoremen Union, Local 1413-1465 from 1950 to 1986. He was awarded plaques in 1986 and 1987 for his outstanding labor. Al also received plaques from the United Social Club for his contribution to Cape Verdean music in 1982 and 1991.

He and his band played frequently at the United Social Club on Sunday afternoons. I fondly remember all the great times I had going to listen to his music at the United Social Club, the Crystal Cafe, the Cape Verdean Ultramarine Band Club, and the Verdean Vets Hall for Saturday Night Dances, which was enjoyed by so many people.

My favorite time of the year was New Year's Eve. My dad played at the Midnight Dances, which were held from 10:00 PM to 2:00 AM After the dances, a group of my friends would meet at Brooke Silver's mother's house where she would prepare breakfast for me and my friends. From there, we would go on to her son Amos' house and start [Foreign Language 00:06:29].

This is a tradition where you go to someone's house. The leader of our group, which was usually Sid Rosario, would say a prayer blessing the home and the host would always have plenty of food to share, and of course, you had to have a shot of whiskey. The band, whether it was Al Oaks or another group, would play a song for the host, and then we would proceed to Bay Village. This would go on until the evening before everyone went their separate ways. It was a great tradition and one that I truly enjoyed.

My father was an extraordinary leader, musician and beloved member of the Cape Verdean community in New Bedford. His memory and contributions to our traditions and values will long be remembered as his history continues to be shared. I miss him especially when listening to Cape Verdean music and his loving memory as my father and friends is in my heart every day.

Interviewer:

That was so lovely. Thank you so much for sharing that.

Marilyn:

Thank you for listening.

Interviewer:

Of course.