



George Kontanis

Okay. Hello, my name is George Kontanis and I'm recording my story and the story of my family. My family were Greek immigrants who owned a candy ice cream shop in the south end of New Bedford on South Water Street. During the Great Textile Strike of 1928 I believe, many of the textile workers were unable to pay for their ice cream or candy, and so my great-grandfather took IOU notes. And of course, many of them were not able to pay even after the strike was settled.

So my grandparents' shop went into bankruptcy and he moved to the minefields of Western Pennsylvania, opened up a similar candy shop, where unfortunately, he passed away from pneumonia at an early age, leaving our grandmother, with four young daughters, a widow. She returned to New Bedford, and I believe was the first Greek American business woman. She opened up her own convenience store on Cove Road in New Bedford across from the old police station and had all of her children go to St. Hyacinth's Catholic School where they learned French because she wanted them to know another language besides Greek and English, and all of them went to St. Hyacinth's. My mother then went on to Bryant College in Providence, and her sisters lived in Providence with her, Eva, Sophie, and Dora. They all met their partners there. My mother moved to Boston with my father, Elias Kontanis, who was studying to be an engineer.

After that, after some time and after I came along, my parents split up. My father was an engineer in New York and then in Athens, Greece, and my mother took a position as a French teacher and a business education teacher at New Bedford High School and the Campbell Kenyon School.

I went to high school here and went with some friends to university in the Middle West, two of us from New Bedford High School, and two from Dartmouth High School, and came back and returned to New York and the West Coast in publishing, and went to graduate school at Fordham University in Medieval and Byzantine history, and continued my career in publishing. I was unable to get a permanent job teaching, the life of an adjunct professor, and came back here in the late nineties to take care of my ailing aunts and take a position at Barnes & Noble Bookstore where I recently retired from. So that is the story, my story, and I hope it will contribute to the oral history of the Whaling Museum and also to the immigrant history, the rich immigrant history I might add, of the city of New Bedford. I am also currently a volunteer with the Rotch-Duff-Jones House and Museum in New Bedford, and I thank you for your time and the opportunity to participate in this oral history project.