



# Charlene Nelson

Interviewer:

All right, so we are recording. This is Emily. I'm here with Charlene, who is going to tell us a family story. So go ahead, Charlene.

Charlene Nelson:

Okay. We're talking about my father's father, William Nelson. He came over here when he was three years old from Slovenia, Norway with his parents.

Firstly, he worked on whaling ships. He was on the Sunbeam and the Wanderer. When the industry ended, he became a fisherman and he became a night watchman with the fishing industry. He was on a rigger, the rigger fell apart, hit him in the back, which he didn't get any subsistence, so he became a night watchman. And he was on... What's the name of the boat... Well, anyway, he was hit from behind and he died of skull fracture, they found him in between two boats.

When he was young, he was married to my grandmother, Helga [Gengberg 00:01:42], she came over here with her sister [Elphina 00:01:47] from Holland, Sweden, they came over here as Au pairs, and they got married in... I don't know the date, but they got married February 23rd. Everything, I've got proof of papers, but I can't read the date. Everything was in cursive.

Interviewer:

Do you know vaguely like what decade at least this was? Would have been in?

Charlene Nelson:

In the early 1900s.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Charlene Nelson:

See, I can't see the-

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Charlene Nelson:

I've got the marriage registered, but it's in cursive. It's like 1900 and I can't understand it. And-

Interviewer:

Sorry, do you know when your relative was on the whale ship, when he was in the fishing industry, do you know roughly what time period that was?



Charlene Nelson:

Well, he was born in 1889, so I don't know if he was a teenager or whatever, but he was on the Sunbeam, like I said, and the Wanderer. I've got paperwork to prove it. And he had three children, my father John Nelson, and my uncle, well, it was William Harold, but we called him Uncle Harold because I had an uncle, uncle Bill, and my aunt Marion. But I never met him because he died in 1942. I was born in 1947. But my grandmother, Helga Gengberg Nelson was just at home and she died of pneumonia.

Interviewer:

Did you know her?

Charlene Nelson:

Nope. She died before... Well, she died probably when I was two. And I had another, my mother's mother, she was born here. She worked at Sta store. It's called the [inaudible 00:04:05]. She worked in the hat department downstairs. And my mother's father, he came from Manchester, England. And he worked at the New Bedford Hotel when it was thriving with all the famous people. He was the elevator operator, cook, waiter. He had a jack of all trades. He did everything. And my mother's grandfather, Fritz [inaudible 00:04:36], he came from Bonn in Germany, he was a professional baker, but he had to be sponsored to become over here. So except for my grandmother, everybody worked. But all I have is just proof of death, and I don't know where to do the research, but everything's documented that he did work in the whaling industry in the early 1900's.

Interviewer:

Yeah. Do you have any other mem... So you said you didn't meet your grandparents. Do you have other memories of your parents you want to talk about?

Charlene Nelson:

Well, my father was a police. Well, my father was a police officer in New Bedford on 25 Spring Street. They did everything before the union. He was the ambulance driver before they branched out. The police did the ambulance driving, they worked on the old cars, they did everything. Now they've got, EMS does a separate job. They've got garage people. But way back then, in 1940s, they did everything. And my mother never worked, but my father retired in 1970. Thank God, they wanted them to go back, but with the riots, they said, "No.". But...

Interviewer:

Can you talk a little bit more about what that was like? The riots? Oh,

Charlene Nelson:

That the things in this world should have never happened, but some of them, people that came to New Bedford started with pushing people around to make them fight. And when... That was in 1970, that we had a curfew that nobody could leave, you know, if did anything, you had to be home at six or seven o'clock. And that was during the summer. And we lived through it. Just some of the people that they had the Black Panthers here exciting the riots that provoked people. I guess everything's on the paper. And I never met anybody except I only had my grandmother that worked and they ad department that I met. All three grandparents passed away before.

Interviewer:

What was your childhood like here? You grew up here, right?



Charlene Nelson:

Yes. Yeah.

Interviewer:

What was your childhood like here?

Charlene Nelson:

Well, having a father as a cop, it was like... Had a boy, well, a guy, and he knew what the mother and the father did or whatever. And it was silly instances that... Well, when I was a teenager, I had long blonde hair and I was a size eight. Now I'm like, triple it. I was walking... Well, I was about 14 years old, walking to my friend's house. I went down Dean Street and there's this cop in the cruiser. He said, "Come here." I said, "No." He says, "Come here. I want to talk to you." So I said, "No." So he says, "You know what I can do if you don't come here to talk to me?" I said, "I don't care." But I said, "My father's sleeping, and when he gets up, he's going to go to station three to relieve you." Boy did that cruiser go from two to seven.

So then, well... My father always instilled in us, make sure you understood, because I've heard all the horror shows and stuff like that. Even though I was supposed to be sleeping, I heard it. And he was working when Father Porter came, well, they arrested him and the diocese from Canada came down and made, there was at... What's that church on the church on County Street? Not St. Lawrence. Further up. Well, anyway, he was a priest there. So my father said, "Anybody gets funny with you, cop, priest or anything, kick and punch and bite and everything. And run like hell." Some of these people, they just freeze.

Interviewer:

So what was he arrested for?

Charlene Nelson:

Huh?

Interviewer:

What was the priest arrested for?

Charlene Nelson:

You didn't know the story about Father Porter?

Interviewer:

No. And they may not know it on the recording either.

Charlene Nelson:

Okay. Father Porter was a priest that liked to have fun with little boys. So instead of the priest retiring or firing him, he kept putting them in different churches and he'd do the same thing. And in the end, then he got married and he did that to his own son. But, then they put him in prison with another prisoner and the prisoner killed him.

Interviewer:

Oh, wow.





Charlene Nelson:

And everybody clapped. So... I'm just, I brought this along. So it's like out of all the whaling people, at least I got proof.

Interviewer:

Yeah, no, thank you very much. Is there anything... Any last things you want to talk about before we wrap up?

Charlene Nelson:

No. Well, I got any information. So anybody with the picture, I still don't understand the pictures of my grandfather. He was a big belt diver, but that probably was a nickname. But he had blonde hair and blue eyes. But don't, nobody kept pictures. Nobody took pictures. But that's the only thing. And I'm going to go down to Fort Rodman to see if anybody returned the original picture who was Lauren's with... It was a brown thing. But if you want to keep all this and...

Interviewer:

Yeah, definitely. So yeah, thank you very much for sharing all this with us. Yeah, it's wonderful that you've done the same research and great hearing about, a little bit about your family and your childhood.

Charlene Nelson:

The only thing, I wish I could figure out where my grandfather's parents got buried. I called all the cemeteries. I know they had a proper burial ground.

And I don't know, there is. I Don't... You're not from New Bedford. There is couple of graves, like if you go up Coral Street down the south end and you take a right, there's two headstones that they buried up there. But way back then, if they came over here from the boat, they had problems with... Wow, what do you call it? That one with the disease where your skin rots that they had in the.

Interviewer:

Leprosy?

Charlene Nelson:

Oh yeah. Which they have an island that right off the coast, it's called the Penikese, that they put them there. Now, it's where they put... It's a boy reform detention area.

Interviewer:

Where is this?

Charlene Nelson:

In the Penikese. It's out... It's an island. If you go straight out, it's, you got to hit there before you hit the Nantucket and Martha Vineyard.

Interviewer:

Okay. So it's [inaudible 00:14:09]

Charlene Nelson:

A small island.



Interviewer:

Okay.

Charlene Nelson:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

All right. Well thank you very much for coming.

Charlene Nelson:

You're welcome.

Interviewer:

And telling the story.

Charlene Nelson:

Yes.