



## Linda Tynan-Minardi

It was 1977 and I was sitting at home recuperating from just having had cancer surgery. Talk to many cancer survivors and they will tell you that once their recovery is over, they have a need to try and accomplish all that they want to do in a short amount of time. I was no different, but at age 27 I was determined to do it all. And so, I decided to complete a graduate level educational testing program at Bridgewater State College. But, I also decided to spend a graduate year studying design at Rhode Island School of Design. Both programs expanded my undergraduate studies. While in school, I read an announcement in the Standard Times, New Bedford's local newspaper, indicating that they were looking for docents at the Whaling Museum. My first thought was, "Wow a combination of art and history that's right up my alley." What could be better and besides, what's one more thing already added to a full schedule. Now this story is not about a cancer survivor as you might suspect, but rather a story about how one Portuguese family like so many others, added to the fabric of what made up the city of New Bedford.

The 12 week class was all that I had hoped for, learning about whales, whaling and the history of New Bedford. It was so interesting, but for me, the class was more than that. Here I was a young adult and I remember thinking as I learned about so many famous local people and how the Rotch and Rodman families impacted our city. I began to think about the fact that I honestly did not know a lot about my own family history. What I did know was that most of my entire family was from the Azores (Graciosa, Pico, and Terceira) and one grandparent was from Madeira, Portugal. I also knew that the cornerstones of our family were simple. From a very early age, my sister and I were taught that education, education and more education along with hard work and more hard work is how you get ahead in life. And lastly, but just as important was that you give back and help others. There was never a question about IF we would go to college, but WHERE we would go to college.

Try telling a self-made man, bright, successful, and so hard-working with only an eighth grade education that you want to study art in college. I can still hear my Dad's very calm voice, "And what else do you want to study?" My Dad had worked his way up the ladder from presser in the factories to the General Manager of R & K Original Dresses in the Kilburn Mill. He was perfect for that job with his bowtie, white starched shirt and creases in his pants. He polished his shoes every single day. He knew good clothes and how they were made and he spent 25 years making the owners of the mill quite wealthy. My Mother, also with an eighth grade education, left her stitching job in the mills during the war to take on what was considered at the time a "man's job" at Morse Cutting Tools. She remained there for 25 years, never going back to being a stitcher as the pay was so much better at Morse. My Mother was a woman before her time, working full time her entire life, walking to work in all kinds of weather and providing full course suppers. Add girl scout leader to the list as well as church Couples Club secretary. I could go on, but if you wanted something done you simply needed to ask her and it got done. We were taught that hard work was the key to success.

And so, after learning how the city became so successful I needed to know how my family fit into New Bedford's success. I asked my Dad to join me as I interviewed my then 87 year old Grandmother. Growing up my sister and I were required to speak Portuguese to my Grandmother, we also learned Portuguese at our grammar school. She refused to learn English because she thought by doing so that she would entirely abandon her culture. I still have my notes from that special day talking to my Grandmother and asking her many questions about our family. I learned that she and her sister came here looking for a better life than what she knew in the Azores. She knew she would more than likely never see her parents again or her other family members, but the thought of a better life sustained her. I also learned that my grandfather had worked on a merchant ship between Madeira and Germany, and that with his experience he then joined the crew on a whaling ship from Cape Verde to New Bedford. My own grandfather, a whaler? I never knew that because I had never asked.



After this conversation, I also sent a family questionnaire to all of my Dad's siblings (4) and my Mom's siblings (11) wanting to know about them and anything that they could share about our family history. It was fascinating and I learned so much both at the museum and about my own family. And so, after my three year commitment at the Museum and my time in grad school it was time to start on my career. I put all of my family interviews, all of my books, handouts, and docent material in a box and packed it away. Life was busy with my career, raising a family, fighting a second bout of cancer and basically living life. But wait, this story isn't over.

I loved sharing what I knew about whales and whaling and vowed that when I retired that I would return. And so in the fall of 2015, after a long career (25 years) as the Director of Admissions at Friends Academy, the Quaker school that William Rotch Junior started, and time as a business owner, I came knocking on the Museum's door to ask if I might join the Docent Council once again. At the same time, I signed up for a Ancestry class and the interview done 30 years ago with my Grandmother was unpacked. Piecing my family history together would certainly have been a lot easier if everyone was still here, but life doesn't always fit together that simply. Thirty years had passed since I walked the galleries of the museum, but I still remember the day that I walked upstairs to the Voyage Around the World display and saw the dedicated area to Azorean Whaling and its culture. This was my culture. This was my family story. That is my church, I grew up in St. John the Baptist Church and all of the crafts that are displayed in the cases our family has many of the same items. So from whaling to the mills of New Bedford my family, like so many other New Bedford families have learned the lessons of our parents. Education, education, education, hard work and more hard work and give back when you can. After my Dad passed away, a scholarship program in his name was offered for several years at St. Lukes Hospital. Since my sister studied medicine we felt that it would be fitting to have the scholarship there. My parents always tried to help others and Dad would have been so thrilled to help with a continuing education program.

From the risk that my grandparents took to better themselves and the bravery that they showed. To the incredibly hard work and success of my own parents. To that continued thirst for education and hard work that my sister and I learned and have thrived on. And finally, from our own three successful children carrying on that tradition that they have seen and learned from, we proudly carry on our Azorean culture. And, we now hope and believe that our grandchildren will continue in the same way.

Every time I give a tour at the Museum it's personal for me. Because each time I am sharing a little about my family and my heritage. There are times that I have wondered if I had never become a docent at the Whaling Museum way back in 1977 would I have learned so much about my own family? I have no answer for that question, but all I can say is, "Thank You" as my own family was truly a part of the fabric that made New Bedford the rich city that it became.