

Interviewer: Tom Girard (TG)

Interviewee: Bob Cote (BC)

Date: Monday, May 16, 2022

Location: Cote home, Biddeford Maine

Transcriber: Nicole Morin-Scribner

TG: My name is Tom Girard. I'm the interviewer and a volunteer with the Biddeford Cultural and Heritage Center. It is Monday, May 16th, 2022. Today I have the privilege of interviewing Robert "Bob" Cote at his home in Biddeford. Bob, thanks so much for agreeing to be interviewed today.

BC: You are welcome.

TG: Normally, we like to start these interviews with asking the person we interview when and where were you born?

BC: I was born here in Biddeford. I lived in Biddeford all of my life. I was born, you asked me when? November 11 in 1943.

TG: Were you born in a hospital? At home?

BC: In a hospital.

TG: At the Webber Hospital?

BC: Yes. I believe it was the Webber Hospital in them days. Notre Dame wasn't built yet.

TG: Do you know the history of how the family came to live in Biddeford. I noticed in your questionnaire that your parents were from New Hampshire.

BC: Yeah. My mother and father came from Berlin, New Hampshire. The mills over there were closing down, some of the pulp mills and they were having layoffs. So, they came down to Rollinsford, New Hampshire. My grandfather on the Cote side comes from Canada. The men came down here to work in the mills. My mother's family were in Somersworth, but they had met in Berlin. They ended up getting married. They came down here and stayed here forever.

TG: Where were their parents from originally? Do you know?

BC: My grandfather was from... (asking his wife, Lucille) What's the name of that city we went to on our honeymoon? (Wife: Montreal?) No, no. From Canada. Sherbrooke, that area. (Wife: Sherbrooke) Yeah. We stayed in Sherbrooke.

My grandfather on the Croteau, side as far as I know, was from New Hampshire. They never talked much about their past too much.

TG: You never went back to Canada or New Hampshire?

BC: I went there on my honeymoon. I went to see some of my aunts that lived in Canada. They were brought up on a farm. They lived over there. They had sold the farm because at that time they had a big sickness and lost all of their cows. They ended up having to sell the farm. They went off on their own. One of my aunts was one of those dealers that you would see on TV in the old days where they have a horse and buggy, and she would go all over the country selling all

kinds of articles to the farmers way out in the country. She would take off on a Monday and come back home on a Friday. She would be selling all kinds of little trinkets and stuff that they needed in the house. If they needed something, she'd come back and pick it up and deliver it the next week.

TG: Almost like Fuller Brush.

BC: Yeah. She got to know all of her customers. She would stay at their houses as she went down. They would put her up and she could stay overnight. She was one of those. The other one worked for a doctor, helping the doctor out. They passed away.

TG: Did they ever come to Maine to visit?

BC: Yes. They came a couple of times to visit with my mother. They would come for a couple of days. They were nice people. They were old and finally passed away. I have no touch with anybody in Canada anymore.

In New Hampshire, I've got more. I have so many relatives in New Hampshire, I don't know half of them. My grandfather had 16 children. The average child had around 6 kids. Some of them have 7 or 8. Others have 4 or 5. All my first cousins, I know the older ones. My mother was the second oldest in the family. My father was the oldest in his family.

So, all the younger ones, when they got married. I have an uncle who is only a month older than I am. When he gets married, and I got married. We got to know each other a little bit but we never were really that close because of the fact that his

kids were way too young. I was taking care of my kids when he was taking care of his. They lived 30-40 miles away, so we don't get to see them that often.

When we have a funeral, when my grandfather passed away, nobody stayed in the funeral home. They had a line that would in and come out. The line was unreal. You go over there and wait half an hour to get to see him. I've got a lot, a lot of first cousins. Half of them I never got to meet too much.

TG: Do you know how your parents met?

BC: No. I'm not sure how they met.

TG: What did your dad do for work?

BC: My father when he came over here, worked for the government. He was working at the shipyard in South Portland. South Portland had a shipyard then. He was a welder. He was a teacher in welding. Then the war developed so he went to war. When he came out of the war, for some reason, he never wanted to go back into welding. I don't know why. He went to bus driving. He could have gotten into the shipyard because he was a disabled vet. But he didn't like that kind of production. He just didn't want to. He wanted to be in the public. He stayed as a bus driver for the Biddeford-Saco bus line for I don't know how many years, all of my childhood. Then he became a milkman for Cole Farm Dairy. He used to deliver to the stores. He was the one that delivered to the stores all around. They liked him. He got known so good that half the stores he would go to, they'd give him a key and he'd go in and deliver at 3-4 o'clock in the morning. He'd deliver the stuff and then go open the Plaza up in the morning.

TG: The Plaza Restaurant?

BC: He would open up the Plaza. He would get the water going for the coffee and he'd go wake up the owner. Then he would go back to the Plaza, and he would stay there and wait for the guy to come in. The guy would come in and the grills were already on, the water was already on. They had that kind of relationship with these people until he passed away. He passed away at 46, very young. He died on the truck, at Scammons in Saco. He passed away over there. He went in the back of the truck to get some milk and never came out.

TG: Oh wow.

BC: At that time, he still had 5 kids at the house. My mother had a tough time for quite a few years.

TG: Did your mom work at all?

BC: No. My mother was busy at the house with the 7 kids. We were up on a farm. My mother worked. She worked hard on the farm. We had 300 chickens. We sold eggs. We sold vegetables and stuff like that.

TG: Where was that?

BC: Up from the Pool Road, next to Davis's Garage. Next to Ledgemere Drive. Ledgemere Drive wasn't there then. Right next to it is where we had our chicken coops.

TG: Was that, and I will pronounce this wrong, L'Heureux. They had the farm there.

BC: L'Heureux was further up. He had a pig farm and cows and stuff. He slaughtered animals. He had a big farm. That was a little bit further up. He was closer to Notre Dame [note: the former hospital]. We were closer to the Masonic Hall. You pass the Masonic Hall, you have Ledgemere Drive and there is a house on the corner. The house before that was ours. My mother and father had 9 acres there.

TG: How did you come to town from there? When you were growing up, every time you came into Biddeford did you walk?

BC: When I was younger, yeah. I was brought up in the city at first. I was brought up on Jellison's Court. I don't think Jellison's Court is there anymore. That's gone. It used to be between Pierson's Lane and Hill Street, there was Jellison's Court. When my father went to war, that's where we were. Then my father came back from the war. After that, he was able to get a loan with the government. That's when we got the farm on the Pool Road.

TG: Was your family all born when your father left for the service?

BC: No. There was my brother and I. My older brother, Raymond and myself. We were the only 2. I'm the second one. Then, my father came back, and he lost the first child. It was a girl. She was at Notre Dame. After that, my sister was

born. Then we moved on the Pool Road. Then he had the four kids on the Pool Road.

TG: How old were you when you moved on the Pool Road?

BC: In 1950, we moved on the Pool Road. I was 7 years old. Like I said, my father had the farm. We put up the chickens. We started off with just 50 chickens then we grew to 300. We had the garden. We sold potatoes and string beans. My father would sell a lot of it when he went to the stores to deliver milk. He would tell them, "Hey. I've got some stuff if you want it." He'd deliver it after work. The farm paid for all of our schoolbooks. All of the vegetables and stuff we would sell at the roadside. My mother canned all of our goods for the winter. We really never bought any vegetables when I was a kid, never. We canned all of our peas, corn, carrots. You name it. We canned string beans and then we had the chickens to live with. Whenever they stopped laying, we'd kill them and that's what we would eat.

TG: You had 6 living siblings, all boys except one girl? What was that like?

BC: Yeah. She was spoiled (laughter). She had her own clothes, right? I mean, we all had hand me downs. And her own room. She was spoiled but not too spoiled. I mean, she was spoiled on some things, but the boys didn't take it easy on her. She was brought up a little bit on the rough and tough side. She became the Vice President of St. Joseph's Credit Union. In fact, she is one of those who started the Credit Union. She was working at St. Andre's Credit Union, and she took off and went over to St. Joe's when they first opened up. She's one of the ones along with Pris Grenier, who initiated and started the Credit Union. She was

working there until she got an aneurism and she had to retire. She was the head of HR over there and was the Vice President of the thing with Al Deshaies. Her and Al Deshaies were together for years. For years and years, they worked together.

TG: He was a character.

BC: He was a character, yeah. He had this little red car that he drove around in. He was a character.

TG: I knew him fairly well.

What was it like for you, growing up in Biddeford? What are some of your memories?

BC: The thing is growing up on a farm, we never came to town that much. If we did, when I was old enough, we'd walk. So, it wasn't something that we'd do too often. My father worked and was on the road all of the time, so it didn't interest him to go anywhere. My mother would like to go shopping once in a while. At Christmas my father would take her shopping. When it comes to the summer, if we wanted to go to the beach, the minute we came out of church, we went to the beach at 8-9 o'clock in the morning. When the people started getting there at 11, my father would leave. We'd have to leave. We only did that 2 or 3 times in the summer.

TG: What beach did you go to?

BC: Fortunes Rocks. Just down the road.

My father wasn't one to go out much. He just stayed at home and worked. We worked in the garden. He gave us our chores in the morning. He'd expect them to be done. If we didn't do them, he didn't get mad. He'd just say, "Hey. This is what I'd like to have done." We'd get up in the morning, take care of the chickens first then go work in the garden. When the sun got too hot, we would go do stuff putting around in the barn. We never really played baseball or did any sports. None at all. When I was in school, the same thing. In high school my father said, "Hey. If you've got time for the sport, I have plenty of things for you to do." In football, which I would have liked to have joined, but I was too small. I was puny when I was young. He said, "You are just going to get hurt and feel it for the rest of your life. Do you want to do that?" So, he talked us out of it, let's put it that way. We always stayed at the house and did most of the stuff there.

TG: Did you guys hang around at Clifford Park at all?

BC: No. We basically stayed at the house. We never really left the house until I was 17 or 18. I was 17 when I graduated from high school. That's when I started branching out a little bit and started to do things. Otherwise than that, I never went to a dance until I was in my senior year. That was at St. Joseph's Parish Hall or St. John's. But, St. John's was very strict. At St. Joseph's the priest would be busy talking with the police and you could do what you wanted, you know? (laughter) But St. John's was very strict. You had to be very careful. You couldn't go in there feeling good, having a drink or be a little too sexy with a girl, you know what I mean. They'd throw you out. That's about the only time I started to go out. On Sundays, I'd go out with a few schoolmates. We'd go to the movies and that was it.

TG: Would that be downtown Biddeford?

BC: It would be whichever theater. City Theater or Central Theater. It depended on what was playing, you know. Central Theater was a nice, classy one. The City Theater, you didn't go upstairs. If you did go upstairs, you sat right down at the balcony. The people that went further up, I think you know that...you didn't belong there. You stayed out of there, my type anyhow. It was more the rougher type that went up in that section. That's about it. I never really did anything. I went around with some of the boys.

I started working at the Pizza House. Before that, I used to work when I was in school. I used to mow lawns in the neighborhood in the afternoon when my chores were done. I had a couple of neighbors; I'd mow their lawns or put their trash out. I would do little things. After that, there was a little bakery that opened, Grandma's Bakery. It was a guy that opened it on the old Pool Road. He was working out of his cellar. He was packing pastries and he was selling them in the store by boxes. He would also sell them individually. I'd go over there and wrap the pastries at night after school. I would do that for a little while. After that, when he moved downtown. He opened up a Grandma's Bakery downtown. He shut his place up.

TG: Where downtown was that?

BC: Do you remember where Grenache's used to be on Alfred Street?

TG: Oh sure.

BC: Right there. He opened up over there. I was around 13 then. He turned around and told my brother and I, "Look, on a Sunday morning after church, if you want to open up the bakery, I'll pay you \$2 for the first \$10 you sell and 10% of everything else after." We used to go in and open up the bakery. All the pastries that he had left from Saturday that weren't sold, we would sell what we could. We'd stay open until 11-12 o'clock until the churches were done. We'd drop off the money at his house. We figured out paychecks ourselves. I was 13, it was big time to figure out that cash. We could eat the pastries we wanted. That was a big, big treat.

Then I went to work at Sears and Roebucks. I was a stock boy at Sears and Roebucks on Alfred Street. On Alfred Street they had the Sears and Roebucks catalog store.

TG: I remember the catalog store.

BC: I used to be the stock boy over there. I used to see all of the shipments coming in. I'd sort out all of the shipments.

When I first came out of high school at 17, I went to work in the mill. They were going to hire me. They had all of the paperwork done and when the guy started to take me down to my job, he looked at my paperwork and said, "You are only 17. I can't put you on a machine." So, he sent me home. He said, "Come back next year." I said, "I'm not going to sit around for a year." That's when I went to Sears and Roebuck and worked over there. I was working at Sears and Roebuck in the morning, 30 hours a week.

My brother-in-law (he became my brother-in-law later on) at the time, he was a classmate of mine. He was working at Alex Pizza, and he said, “Hey, we can use some extra help. Business is picking up.” I went to work there on weekends. I would work at Sears and Roebuck during the week. That’s how it got started. From there, the hours grew, the business grew, and my hours grew.

TG: We’ll come back to Alex Pizza in a few minutes.

What are your memories of downtown Biddeford?

BC: It was so different. It was so nice. You could walk down the street. On a Friday night it was something else. You had Fishman’s, you had Woolworths, you had Butlers, Polakewich. I remember going to the Butter Store. You would go there and buy peanut butter by the pound. They would take it out of the bowl.

TG: Ames or was that something else?

BC: What was the name of that one? It was right on the corner of Franklin Street [audio edit at 19:48] and Main Street. It was a butter store. They used to sell peanut butter, butter and stuff like that. Then there was a JC Penney. I used to be amazed because at JC Penney, they had their office on the second floor which was wide open. You used to buy your stuff downstairs. Their shoes, I loved their shoes. I used to buy their shoes. They would put it in a cylinder like you have at the banks now today. In them days, that was rare. They would put it in there and they would shoot it. You could watch it go alllll the way up to the office over there. They would open it up and take their paperwork. I was amazed.

TG: As a little boy, I was mesmerized by that.

BC: I used to watch that thing go by, and I used to be so amazed. Then there was a Gauf Kauf's [Note: Kauf's Home and Auto Stores] at the other end down there. We had the first A & P. There was Edwards Supermarket. I mean wow, that was so big in them days. It was nice because you could walk down Main Street. You felt comfortable. You felt safe. It was all alive. It was bright. There was always something going on. Everybody was pleasant. Even though you'd bump into somebody, they wouldn't be grouchy about it. Everybody would excuse themselves, more than anything else. It was just a nice atmosphere.

Everybody hung in their own corner. The St. Louis crowd would hang in the Puritan. The Biddeford crowd would hang in at the Mayflower. There wasn't no rival thing, you know what I mean. There was rivals at the football games after the games then you go by one of those places and the other crowd would cheer or boo you or something. During the week or during the course of the year, nobody went over and started a problem with the other group. Everybody would mind their own. It was pleasant.

My father would drop my mother there at Christmas and she would walk around the stores. She was safe. Now, I don't know if I'd dare do that. I used to walk home from work, and I'd worry sometimes. A couple of times I was followed.

Today it's even worse. At nighttime, it's something else. Main Street, it's dead. You go down Main Street, it's dead. You see some people here and there. It's starting to pick up a little bit. It seems a little bit better. You take one part of Main Street seems alive but the minute you pass Alfred Street, it's going down. I don't know what they can do to revive it. It's not the businesses themselves. It's the

building and the atmosphere that you've got to revive. If they could revive that a little bit, it would be nice. Those big stores like Fishman's and Woolworth and stuff, they lit up the town. Like I said, Butler's and Polakewich which was very high quality. We had a good variety of stuff right there in a small section.

TG: I know you were from a big family, but did you ever eat at any of the restaurants in downtown Biddeford?

BC: Never got to eat there. Never, never ate there. I used to walk by there at Christmas with my mom. The Wonderbar or even at Fishmans' they had that counter and the one at Woolworth, but my mother figured we can make it at home a lot cheaper. I never ate in the restaurant until I started going out with my wife. That's when I finally started going out.

TG: Reilly's Bakery?

BC: Reilly's Bakery, yeah. I used to go to Reilly's Bakery when the kids were younger. I used to pick up the bags. They had baggies. For a nickel, you could get the baggy and it was all the Neapolitans and fig squares, all the crust at the end when they cut it off and squared it off, they would throw all of those crusts in a bag. That was our big treat. You hoped that you would hit one with some fig in there or juice in there. If there was a pastry that crushed or broken, like a cream roll that broke or something, they would put it in that bag for a nickel. That was the highlight of our going out.

TG: You went to St. Andre's Grammar School?

BC: Yeah.

TG: What are your memories of going to school there? Did you have nuns or combination of nuns and Brothers?

BC: It was a combination. We had the nuns until the 6th grade. Then they put me over to the Brothers in the 5th or 6th grade. The nuns were ...they'd run a concentration camp. There were a few that were decent. But half of them were old spinsters I should say. They could be very crabby.

When I went to kindergarten, I had what was her name? Hey Lou...what was the name of the girl in kindergarten? (Wife response: Simone?) Yeah Simone. Oh she was...I don't say that on tape. If you would utter a word, she would take a boy if he uttered a word and put him on the girls' half of the class in a crib. She would actually put you in a crib. She would put you with the girls, because you were a talker. Anything you did wrong; she'd put you in the corner. She'd humiliate people to the point where you'd get so humiliated, people were afraid to speak up or say or do anything on their own. You couldn't express yourself in any way.

Then when you went to the nuns, the first one, she was a bummer. We'd eat our lunch in the classroom. If my mother gave me an apple to eat, and you crunch on the apple and make a noise, the teacher would give you hell. If you back talked or said something, you go out in the front. She would have you put your hand out and she would take her clicker that she would use to make the people listen. She would turn it over. It was like a stick. She would hit you in the back of the knuckles.

That's the kind of nun that I had when I was in there. When I went to the Brothers, they were ok. They were also relatively mean. The brother would stand there and

if you were talking while they were writing on the chalkboard, he'd turn around with his piece of chalk and just barrel lance it. Sometimes, you'd have it on the head. Sometimes you'd get hit by the eraser or by the chalk. It was nothing to them to do that or slap you against the blackboard. They would do a physical.

I did fairly good in school. I was doing quite good. They made me skip 7th grade because they didn't have enough room. I was one of the top ones of the class, so they put me in the 8th grade. By the time I got in there and started learning. I said, "I'm busting my balls off here for trying to catch up on something that I didn't get in the first place." I sat back and took it easy that year. I told them. "I don't care. I'll do the 8th grade a second time." They wanted me to pass, and I said, "No." I had a 65 or something and they offered me my 70. I said, "No. I don't want to go to high school the same way I did in the 8th grade. I don't want to do that." I stayed back in the 8th grade and went to high school with my regular class. It was my regular buddies and my regular class. Over there at St. Andre's, they just pushed you along.

TG: In the lower grades, boys and girls were together and they separated you...

BC: No. We were separated. The only time we were together was in kindergarten. The minute you got out of kindergarten, the boys and girls were separated.

TG: Did the girls have nuns?

BC: Yeah. The girls stayed with the nuns all of the way. When the boys got to first grade, they went over to the other side. The same thing with St. Joe's. When

we went to St. Louis, we weren't even allowed to look in the doors to watch the girls come down the stairs on the other side. We weren't even allowed to do that.

TG: Your family went to St. Andre's Church?

BC: Yeah. They all went to St. Andre's.

TG: Memories of going to church there?

BC: That was nice going to church. I used to like the church over there. It was nice. My mother was religious and my father too. I mean they never, never missed church. I remember walking down on Saturdays to go to church when we used to do our novenas and stuff. My father was gone to work so we'd walk downtown and go to church and come back. I liked St. Andre's until they started at the end, when it was getting a little bit different. You know what I mean? They started closing off the parking lot because people didn't want to park correctly. They towed all of the cars away. It just wasn't being run right. The priest at the end, they weren't doing things right. I felt abandoned. I didn't feel that comfortable coming to St. Joe's because St. Joe's is so big. St. Andre's was smaller and comfortable. St. Joe's, I was lost when I started going to St. Joe's. I like St. Joe's. I got used to it.

TG: Did most of your class go over to St. Louis with you?

BC: Oh yeah. 90% did.

TG: Most of the girls probably stayed at St. Andre High School?

BC: Yes. St. Andre's. But we didn't know the girls anyhow, so it didn't make any difference. We were separated. Most of the boys went to St. Louis. It was automatic.

TG: What are your memories of St. Louis High School?

BC: St. Louis High School was good. Good memories. There was a Brother Albert. I don't know if you knew him. He was the principal. That's the only one that was a sour note, for me anyhow. He used to teach Latin. You had to take Latin if you took a college course. You had no choice but to take Latin. I didn't want him for a teacher because he was overly strict. I stayed in the business course because of him. That was it. Otherwise than that, all of the teachers there were excellent teachers. Mr. Cote especially was the best teacher I ever had. He was extremely good, extremely good. They were all good teachers there. They were all nice. Mr. Faucher, Mr. _____, the Brothers, they were all nice at St. Louis.

TG: Before we went online with this, we were talking about Mr. Cote, the teacher who you had, and I also had. Later you were saying he lived in this house that you are in.

BC: Yeah. He was brought up in this house, I found out later on. I didn't know that at the time. After I bought the house, all of a sudden, I bumped into him or one of his relatives, his aunt. She was telling me that this is where he was brought up. I said, "Oh my God." So, I invited him over. I said, "Why don't you come over and see some of the changes in the house." He didn't want to drop by. I don't think he wanted to see the memories I don't know. He didn't drop by. So, I said,

“OK.” I liked Mr. Cote. He was very, very good. He was brought up here. It’s strange because later on how funny life is. You meet back down the road.

TG: Did you attend a lot of sporting events when you were in high school?

BC: No. The only thing that I attended when I was in high school was a few football games. The football games are what I went to when I was in my junior and senior year. Before that I wouldn’t go anywhere. By my junior year, I started going to a few football games. My senior year, I was allowed to go. After I came out of high school, I started working at the Pizza House and I couldn’t go to the games because I was working. I was cooking for when they came out of the game.

TG: I think your sophomore year was the year they won the state championship.

BC: Yes

TG: Was there a big celebration at school after that?

BC: Oh yeah, yeah.

TG: I was young then, but I can remember that being a huge deal.

BC: Yeah. It was big thing at the school. I didn’t get to go to too much of that stuff, you know what I mean? I wasn’t into that stuff at all. We didn’t participate in any of those activities at all. I know they used to go down and ring the bell and it was a big celebration that year. Very big.

TG: Did all of your siblings go to St. Louis and St. Andre?

BC: Yeah. They went there and St. Louis until St. Louis High School closed. The last ones ended up at Biddeford, my last siblings.

TG: What do you remember about the closing of the school?

BC: Not that much. I was working. I had the kids then, my own family. I remember that a bit. I went to visit it a couple of times. I went back there to see the school. It brought back memories, but I don't remember that much about it.

After that, I started working. From there I was working the two jobs, Sears and Roebucks and the Pizza House. Eventually I got so many hours at the Pizza House I dropped off Sears and stayed there. Then the war was on, Vietnam. It was hanging in to see if you were going to get drafted or not. In the meantime, I got married so everything got postponed and postponed. I stayed here. I was working 60 hours a week. Between that and the family, I never really had much of a chance to do much. I concentrated on that.

TG: When you came out of high school, you were waiting to see if you were going to get drafted?

BC: Yeah. It wasn't long after. I graduated in 1961. The war was on the way down. I sat back and waited. I didn't want to just join the service. I didn't believe in going over to Vietnam if I could help it. But I said, "Hey, I'll go if I'm called." I went and signed up for the draft, sat back and waited. I got my papers to go for the draft. I got them when I was on my honeymoon. When I came back from my

honeymoon, they said, “You are married now. You will be backed up for another year.” I was backed up for another year and never got called.

TG: Did you have friends that went?

BC: Oh yeah. I have some friends that went, some classmates.

TG: They served in Vietnam?

BC: Yeah. There are a couple that did. Quite a few classmates I guess, but of my close friends, only a few did.

TG: How did you meet your wife?

BC: I was on a blind date?

TG: Really? Who set that up?

BC: Her cousin. One of my best friends married her cousin. They were going out at the time. It came Christmas so his girlfriend said, “Hey. My cousin (which is my wife now) hasn’t got a date.” I didn’t have a date so the two of them set it up. They said, “OK, fine.” So, they put us together. We met on New Year’s Eve.

TG: Where did you go for New Year’s Eve?

BC: We went to the Sportsmen’s Grill.

TG: In Portland?

BC: In Portland. We went over there at the Sportsmen's Grill and had a meal. That's how I got to meet her. After that, I called her up and we went out a few more times. After that, we started going out and that's it.

TG: When did you get married?

BC: I got married in August, the same year. My wife is one of those that you either get to know her, or you don't. She's not like I am. I'm one of those that it takes a while to get to know me. This may sound a little funny on tape but, I pick her up. I have Tuesdays and Wednesdays off. Most of the time it was one day off but it was Tuesday or something. It was in the middle of the week. She was working at Kesslen Shoe, and I was working at the Pizza House. I couldn't go out and stay late and that stuff. Her father wouldn't allow me to keep her out later than 11 o'clock, no matter what. We used to go out. I'd pick her up and we'd just go to a movie or something like that, but you had to come back early. We would actually go riding around and on a Tuesday, there wasn't too much to do. You couldn't go to a dance. There was nothing going on. I'd go riding around, go to the beach and go parking at Biddeford Pool. People would say, "Oh you went parking at Biddeford Pool. You had a good time." I'd say, "No. I went parking at Biddeford Pool and she would sit down and question me. She'd pick at me until she got to know me. We'd sit over there for an hour or so. Forty-five minutes of it was talking. Finally, I'd bring her back home. This is how I got to know her so fast. I went out with a girl before that for a while and I didn't even know her, really. Lucille (who is now my wife), after 3 or 4 months I knew what she was like. She told me what she liked and what she didn't like. Believe me, she told me

everything. She laid it right out. I got to know her so good that in August, we got engaged and got married in November.

TG: Wow. How long have you been married?

BC: I don't know, now since 1964 is what? Fifty some odd years.

TG: 58?

BC: Something like that.

TG: Two children?

BC: Two children. We lost two.

TG: Oh. I'm sorry.

BC: We got two and we lost two.

TG: Are your children local?

BC: One of them. My boy is still here. He's back at home. He left for a little while, but he came back home. My daughter lives in Limerick. She's married and has two kids.

TG: So, you have two grandchildren?

BC: Two grandchildren and one great grandchild. They live up in Limerick.

TG: You get to see them a lot?

BC: Oh yeah. My daughter comes down every Saturday. Every Saturday, she is here. My grandkids, I don't see them too, too much. They work in Poland Springs. They have an awful work schedule over there. They work 10-12 hours a day. Their schedule is pretty tough. I don't get to see them too, too much. He's got his kid now. We see each other on holidays. They come and visit at least a couple of times a year. We don't see each other monthly or anything. They are both busy.

TG: So, you are married, you're still at Alex Pizza.

BC: Yeah.

TG: Did you think you would be at Alex Pizza the rest of your working life?

BC: Yes. At first, I was thinking of going to Pratt and Whitney when Pratt and Whitney opened. I had a couple of workers that left and went there. At the time, my wife wasn't feeling good. She was sick. It was risky to take a chance changing jobs. With the help leaving over there, my hours got even worse. I just stuck it out and stuck it out. At one point, I almost opened my own. I came close.

TG: I was going to ask you that, if you ever thought of going out on your own. Or franchising Alex or something.

BC: Oh no, no, no. I was going to open on my own. But when I went to the bank, they wanted my front teeth and everything. I said, “OK, fine. I’ll stick it out a couple more years and work it out and see what I can do.”

I had a corporation started. I had my corporation, and everything set up. I had some equipment already bought. I had it stored. I was getting ready to do something. It fizzled out. I said, “Ok. Fine.” I let that go for now.

Then, Louie’s came for sale. I said, “Ok. It’s just down the street. It’s instant. It’s fast.” By then I had accumulated enough money that I could afford to do it. Between sickness, medications, the kids and my daughter going to college, finances were pretty tight. I was able to pick up Louie’s. So, I go down to pick up Louie’s and I had to be very careful. I don’t know if you know the Greek people. If they would know that I was looking to buy Louie’s Pizza, I’d be out of a job. I said, “I can’t put my face there, but I have a friend of mine who went.” He put his face in for me and he was going to do the front work for me. I was going to be in the background. In the meantime, my wife said, “Bob, you haven’t had a good checkup in a few years. Before we sign the papers and do all of this, why don’t you go for a good physical.” I went for a physical and I flunked. That’s when they found out I needed a triple bypass.

TG: Oh God.

BC: I said, “Put that out of the window. If I take that, it’s going to kill me.” So, I just never bothered. This other gentleman bought it. From there, I just stayed at the Pizza House until it was time for me to retire.

TG: Did Alex ever know you pursued that?

BC: No. I never told him. I have another person too, another businessman who confronted me one time. He wanted me to open up. I said, "OK. Fine." He was going to back me up because I didn't have the money. He was going to back me up and I was going to run the place. He was going to finance it. The first thing you know, after the second or third meeting, he started telling me, "We'll be doing this, and we'll be doing that." I said, "No. The agreement is I'm running the place you are going to finance it. I've already got a job. I don't need to have another guy tell me what I'm going to do. I know what I'm doing. I know I can run it right. I know I can do it right. I just want to be left alone." Oh, he wanted to have breakfast and he wanted to do this. I backed out. I didn't do it.

TG: The original Alex Pizza was down the street a little, right?

BC: It was where the brown building is where the homes are for the older people. The Crooked Cane was there before. Right next to Sandler's. Sandler's had their warehouse over there. We were right there. It was an old house. It had rooms upstairs. They converted the downstairs for the Pizza House. We opened over there. Eventually we moved to the corner.

TG: When did it open?

BC: It opened in 1960.

TG: When did they move it to the current location?

BC: In 1968. When we moved to the current location, Thompson's Appliances was there. He had just gotten out. Sandler owned that building, just like he owned the building where we were. We moved over there. We fixed up the whole inside. It was just plain. They fixed it all up. On the other side was a liquor store.

TG: Truman Driving School wasn't there anymore?

BC: No. It wasn't even there. It was a liquor store. Then the liquor store moved out and Truman's Driving School moved in. Truman was there for a couple of years. After Truman moved out, our business was growing by then and growing enough that we expanded over there. That's when we took over the other side.

TG: Was that the reason he moved, to have more space?

BC: Oh yes. We needed more dining, more ovens. We couldn't keep up. We had the 3 ovens in the front, and we had 2 in the back. The kitchen was quite small to start with. There was no room. We needed to move out and expand.

TG: How did Alex get his start?

BC: Way back, his uncle in Brockton, Massachusetts had a Pizza House. When he was a kid, he used to go there. He'd go visit once or twice a year. He fell in love with the idea of the pizza. He came over here, when he was older. Then the war came over, World War II. After the war, Paras Pizza came over and opened up a Pizza House on Pool Street.

TG: I remember that.

BC: Before the war, Alex used to own the Biddeford-Saco paper. He was running it. When the war developed, they couldn't get the paper. You couldn't get bags, you couldn't get paper goods, you couldn't get all of that stuff. So, Alex had to just about declare bankruptcy. He paid all of his bills. He worked a whole year just clearing out all of the bills. He phased it out. Then, he went to war. When he came back from the war. He started roaming around. He went out west. He worked out west for a couple of years. He stayed out there with some of his buddies, him and Red (they owned the bar room next to Georges' Italian).

TG: Doc's Tavern?

BC: Yeah. Doc's Tavern. Him, Red and Peter Fitanides and some of these guys. These guys, they all got together. They all went to California. They worked over there for a few years.

Then he came back. When he came back, Paras Pizza had opened up on Pool Street. Alex's sister was married to a Paras. His brother was the one that opened up the Pizza House on Pool Street. So, Alex came back and got himself a job over there. He started working over there, but they didn't get along. Alex was telling him that he should move downtown. He didn't want to. There was a big clash so him and Ernest Paras broke apart. Alex left. He opened up in town. When he opened up in town, that set up a family dispute, a little bit. Alex opened up and stayed there. Paras eventually opened up on the corner of Jefferson and Alfred. The place that burned down, where Louie's Pizza was for years. He sold it to Louie's Pizza. They changed it from Paras to Louie's. Alex stayed in business and from there we went on. That's how Alex got started.

When Alex left Paras on Pool Street and opened on Alfred Street, Alex went out to see his uncle in Brockton to get some of his recipes. That's one of the clashes that they had. Alex had an ulcer. He had to eat something that... he couldn't stand it if it came back up on you. Like if you are going to eat a meal and then it's going to come back up a half hour later...

TG: Acid reflux?

BC: Yeah. He couldn't take that. So, he worked on his spices until he got it to a point where it wouldn't come back on you. It was mellow but yet spicy. That's why his recipe was totally different.

TG: So, the rumors that he stole Paras Pizza's recipe are only rumors?

BC: Are only rumors. That's only a rumor. He started working there and probably got the techniques and stuff, but the recipes were from Brockton Massachusetts. That's where they come from.

TG: What do you think made Alex Pizza THE pizza place in Biddeford, Saco, Old Orchard for all these years?

BC: Alex was single. He didn't care to make himself super rich. He said, "I want to make money. I want to have a good life." He wasn't the hardest worker in the world. Alex would go in and do his work, but he wasn't overly ambitious. He didn't want to open up 2-3 places and all this kind of stuff. He said, "The more I make, the more the government is going to take. What's the difference? I'm going

to kill myself for what? To have more money? After you have so much money, you don't need anymore." He said he had a good life. He's a gambler. He used to like to go out west 2-3 times a year. He'd go to Vegas. He had his trips. He had his money. He lived a comfortable life. He was happy with that. He never overpriced the people. He always kept quality. He said, "Quality comes before quantity." That was his motto. Look in the dictionary. Quality is before quantity. That's what the motto was. We always made sure everything was the top quality. We never branched out to put different things in like sandwiches and salads. He never wanted to do that because he said it would take away from his thing.

After the business started growing, he worked hard. He went in the mills. He got some people in the mills that he knew. He made deals with them. If you get me some orders, I'll give you a free lunch. They would go around and pick up 10-12 orders. We would go deliver to the mills. We'd deliver to them and give that guy his free lunch. Well, we got 12 people to try our pie. We did the same thing with UNE [note: University of New England] We'd go to UNE and we'd have the students come down. When new students would drop by the Pizza House, we would tell them, "You get me an order of 20 or more, I'll give you a free meal and we'll deliver the pies." The guys at the college used to get orders for 15 or 20 pies. They would charge half a buck or a quarter more for the pie. They made money. They'd get a free lunch besides. We'd deliver the pies to them. We got all of these college kids to get a taste of the pizza so they would come down. That's how the business grew. We did that to the mills, we did it over there, we did it to the shoe shops. When all of those shoe shops were here, we had deliveries over there. We'd go over there on a Friday morning with 4-5 boxes of pizzas to deliver pies.

TG: To many people in the community, you and Alex's brother Andy Mantis and sister-in-law, are the face of Alex Pizza. For years, if you go in, one or all of you are there. You didn't see Alex. I think a lot of people thought you were Alex.

BC: A lot of people used to come in and call me Alex. Besides that, I think I look like a Greek because I have black hair and a big nose. (laughter)

Alex, like I said, wasn't the hardest worker in the world. So, if he could have time off, he would take it. He wouldn't say, "Hey. I'll work and cut the labor out." He'd let the labor have the labor and he'd go and take it easy. He did it that way. He wasn't there that much. The first few years, he was there. He'd check in every day. He was there every day. If there was a complaint of any kind, about the pizza or if somebody complained about something, boy I'll tell you, he was down there checking it out, making sure that the complaint was taken care of. You didn't make that same error a second time. He made sure, as I said, our motto was the quality.

When I used to teach the kids, I used to say, "Hey, my mother's going to come in and buy a pizza today. I don't know which pizza she is going to be getting. It better be good." This way here, no matter which pizza you make, make them all right because you don't know which one she's getting. This is the way we were developed. Alex was very strict on that, to make sure that if customers complained, give them a new pie. Not a problem. Bring me the old pie to show me that there was something wrong with it and you get yourself a new pie, no questions asked.

TG: Who made the pizzas?

BC: Me. As a matter of fact, without cutting anything off too much, after so many years, Alex wanted to retire. All he did was he'd show up at nighttime to pick up the money. He wouldn't even show up to open up. I'd open up in the morning. I'd get the kitchen going. I'd stay through supper. Then, Mike and Effie would come in and close it at nighttime. They were the night people. They would come in and close up at nighttime. After a while, Mike used to take the money home. He'd cash out and take the money home. Then Alex would pick it up the next day or something. Alex wasn't there that much, very, very little. The first thing you know, I'd be doing everything. I made from the spices to the dough. I did some of everything.

When Andy came over and Alex took Andy in because he wanted to retire. Mike and Effie had retired by then. I showed him how to make the spices. Andy was the same way as Alex. The first summer that Andy worked there, he was hardly there.

TG: Was he still teaching?

BC: No. He had left. He took a year sabbatical. At the end of the year, Alex told him, "At the end of the year, we'll decide if you want to stay or not." That summer Andy went to Vegas with Alex. He was traveling with him. They went around the world. They took a tour around the world. I was running the place. They went all over the world. They were gone for 3 months. By the time he came back, he knew a little bit about the Pizza House but not that much. He was enjoying his life. He said, "I don't want to go back to teaching. Why should I go back to teaching? I like this job." Alex said, "Ok." So, he kept him on. Andy stayed on. He didn't go

back to teaching. After that, Andy stayed because he lost his teaching job, anyhow. He stayed and that's when he started picking up. Alex told him, "You've got learn it. I'm not going to be here all of the time. You got to learn it." So, he started to learn what to do at the Pizza House.

I taught him what to do. When I left, Andy knew how to make the dough, but he still didn't know the spices and stuff. I was the one making them. I thought if I retire and I don't give him the spices, then the pie is going to change so much. I worked 52 years over there and my customers know me well and I know them. We had a relationship, not friendly, friendly but a good relationship. I can't see somebody coming in and spending their good money, buying the pizza and not getting what they are supposed to get. That's not fair either. So, I showed him the spices, I showed him everything I had to do. I went back down a couple of times after I retired to settle things up because they were having problems. I've gone down and told him, "Anytime you have a problem, give me a call. I'll come down and I'll settle it."

But I will not stay there and work because Andy, as it went along, had his nephews there. The nephews, whatever they did was correct. Whatever I did was wrong. It got to the point where they pressured me out. When they pressured me out, I told Andy, "I will come down and help you because I want to satisfy my customers. But, I will not come down and help them to put out the production. I said they are on their own. If they want to push me out because they don't want me there, then I won't be there. Not for them." So, I'll go down and give Andy a hand if he needs one or if he needs some advice. I go down and give him some advice. More than once, I'll give Stephanie advice. I don't care. I don't mind.

TG: His daughter Stephanie is running it now?

BC: She's running it now. Her and the twins, the two guys that pushed me out.

TG: How many years did you end up working there?

BC: 52 years. So that's what happened. Not too many people know the fact about why I left. As far as everybody's concerned, I retired. I was planning on staying there part-time, working weekends and keeping in touch. Staying there and making a few bucks. But I couldn't take that. I said, "I'm not going to be the face in the front and then they do what they want in the back." So, I left.

TG: It sounds like except towards the end of your time at Alex, overall went fairly well. You enjoyed your work.

BC: They left me alone. Nobody would bother me because I took care of the place. All they had to do, Andy would come in if we were short-handed, give us a hand for an hour or so and then he'd leave. If he had something else, he wanted to do, he wouldn't even show up. He'd show up only to cash out. He'd pick up the money at nighttime. The rest of the time, I took care of the place. I hired the people. I trained them. I put out the product. If somebody was missing, they'd call me up on my days off. I'd go in and make sure the kitchen was all settled. If there was a cook that didn't show up, I'd come in and take his place. They had me on the side so Andy never needed to go in. He did like Alex, he stayed on the outside. They never bothered me. I liked it because I was like my own boss. The only thing is it got to the point where they outnumbered me.

TG: Andy, had the same philosophy as Alex in doing just one thing and doing it well? Not putting in sandwiches or...

BC: Andy wanted to put in sandwiches when he first took it over. He wanted to put in salads. He wanted to put in other things. I wasn't in for it. I guess he fizzled out. He looked at it. He was going to. He talked about it. He was going to put larger pies and do different sizes. I never pushed it or backed it up. He mentioned it, then fizzled out and never did. In other words, if he would have wanted to do it, he would have had to do it on his own. He didn't want to do that. I didn't want to do it. I didn't want to change anything that was working so good. This way here, our product stays fresh. I never ran out of pies when I was there because you plan your day. When you sell so much for lunch, you say, "Oh. I've got to get ready for supper." You do a few more in the afternoon. You've got to prepare things a couple of hours ahead. You see to it that you don't run out. Today, they just go in the morning. They put so much out and that's it. If they sell out, they sell out.

TG: Then they just close?

BC: They close up. They don't care. They close up at 6-7 o'clock sometimes. They go in the morning and produce so much in the back room. That's it. It's not the same thing anymore. It's just not the same.

TG: Andy never thought of opening other locations?

BC: Alex at one time did. He was going to open one out west. He had a friend out there from when he lived out west for a few years. The guy was going to open

one up. Alex was going to go and get him started and come back. Then, the guy backed out.

Gregory Paras, the one that was married to his sister, Alex opened up a place for him in Laconia. He opened it up and got it started. After it got started, he just gave it to him. He said, "It's yours. Run it." He said it was his sister and he was living with them. So, he just gave it to him.

That's just about wraps up my life.

TG: One of the things we like to explore is local or national events and your memories of them. We talked about the Vietnam War a little bit. You might have been too young to remember the great fires in 1947. Do you remember those at all?

BC: No. I don't remember those. But the house that we lived in there were some trees in the back that were burnt. We could tell that the fire came very close to the house. If you go out there, there were some apple trees out in the back fields. The priest used to come down and do some prayers. You see the medals that they put up in the trees to prevent the fire from coming across. It never got really close to the house. I don't remember that fire, no.

TG: What about where you were and your thoughts around when President Kennedy was assassinated?

BC: I was coming home from school. I was still in high school. I was just coming home from school when he was assassinated. That was a sad day. That was a sad

day. He was quite the president. We found out a lot of things about him later that weren't quite the same as what we were told. At the time, he was quite the hero. It was a sad day.

TG: Do you remember the Hooper Street fire and the Grafton Lumber fire? They were back-to-back.

BC: Yeah. Boy did that burn. Oh yeah. Cleaned out Hooper Street. And the Grafton fire and there was another lumber yard down there. That was bad. I don't remember it, but I was also told about the flood that was over there at that time. Leo (can't remember his name) When you cross the bridge and you make the corner where Deering [note: Lumber] is, that whole area got flooded one year. He was living in that house on that little side street, Market Street, I think. That little side street that goes off the minute you pass the bridge, Dominos and stuff, its that side street the minute you pass the bridge.

TG: I know what you mean.

BC: He was living in that house where its like a "V". He said the water was right up to the house. The river was in the back and the front, and it was right up in there. He told me about it, but I don't remember that.

TG: I want to go back to Alex Pizza for a second. Do you have any humorous stories that you can share?

BC: Oh yeah. Some of them are humorous. Like I said Alex was hardly ever there. I remember one time where there were a bunch of guys that came in, 2 guys

came in. It was on a Friday night, and they were rough. They came in and ordered pizzas. They ate and took off. The next week, they showed up with their friends. There must have been around 15-20 of them that showed up. There weren't in cars, but they were bikers and stuff like that. They were rough. In them days, the cops used to patrol by feet. They used to walk the beats. Ted Drouin was one of the cops that used to be in our neighborhood. He comes by. He walks in and sees this rowdy crowd. In the meantime, Alex comes in. He was going out with the girl who was working the cashier. He comes in and sees the crowd. He says, "I'm not going to put up with this." Alex said to the girl, "Come on. I'm going to take you home." He takes her home. I'm there alone. I'm looking at these guys. These guys are walking around and going in the kitchen. I'm trying to get them out of the kitchen and the guy is walking in back of the stove and stuff. Ted Drouin comes in. He says, "Bob. What is this? You are busy?" I said, "Yeah but it's not the kind of business I like." He says, "You got a problem?" I said, "Not yet." "Ok then." And he takes off. He knew there was a problem. The next thing you know, I see these guys get up and they say, "We'll take our pies to go." They start taking off. Ted Drouin was sitting at the Letourneau filling station, which is across the street where today is Paul's Variety. He was sitting over there, in the cruiser, with 6 cops. They had their billyclubs. The light was on inside the cruiser so you could see the 6 cops with their billyclubs waiting. You see these guys file out and they never came back. (laughter) Ted saved me. I don't know what would have happened from there.

Otherwise from that, we did pretty well. We've had times when the guy who used to live upstairs, it was rough up there. The upstairs of the Pizza House at that time was rough. We were known to live in the combat zone of Biddeford. Like, they

found a guy underneath a refrigerator one time. They don't know how he got there.

Another time, there was a guy who lost at Russian Roulette. He lost his turn.

TG: There's nothing up above now is there?

BC: No. It's mostly empty. There's only one guy who lives up there now. Another time there was a big crowd across the street. People were wondering why. A girl came in and she had walked up to the back of the Pizza House, went upstairs, found her husband in a room with some girl and she was trying to put him out of the third-floor window. She's pushing him and the screen wouldn't break. She's pushing him and the crowd is waiting to see if the guy is going to go through the screen or not. Stuff like that.

There was a murder up there one time. I walked in on a murder. A guy got his head crushed in.

There was a bar across the street at the time. There was a little bar where the post office is. There was a bar there. At nighttime, when that bar emptied out, there were a lot of the ruffians. They'd be living upstairs, or they'd be in the neighborhood. It was a rough neighborhood.

TG: When the Post Office went in, that kind of served you guys well, right? You had a parking lot...

BC: Oh yeah. The parking lot as well as they gutted the bar. There were a couple of houses there next to it that was really pretty rough neighborhood. They cleared all of that stuff out. It really changed the whole corner. It changed everything after that. Besides that, when the city bought out Sandlers, they changed Pool Street. Pool Street used to come out and then you had to turn right and turn left again for Jefferson. They turned around and bought T Sisters [note: T Sisters Market] and changed the street. That took care of all the ruffians in that section. It changed Alfred Street a lot when the Post Office and the city did that. It changed the whole atmosphere. It became a more safe place. Even though it was a rough neighborhood, we never had problems because we never put up with any bullshit at all. We never had loud music in there. We had an old-fashioned radio. We ran the radio. All the bums, we'd throw out just as fast as they came in. We didn't care. We just threw them right out.

We had a few fights in there. One time one guy was asking for it. He really was asking for it. A guy came in and he was sort of husky. He came to sit down and missed the chair. The other guy starts laughing at him. He sat down in the chair. This guy kept teasing him and teasing him and teasing him. I told him, "Hey. Leave him alone." The guy was feeling good. He said, "No, no, no." He kept on. The guy got up, just picked the guy up and gave him one punch. The guy hit the floor and slid all the way down across the room. Come to find out, the guy that was being teased, the guy that missed the chair was celebrating because he is a Golden Glover. I mean, I go over there to grab the guy because I don't want him to hit him a second time and when I grabbed his muscles and I see that he's flexing his muscles. I said to myself, "Bob, you don't belong here. I don't know what hell I'm doing here." But then his buddy turned around and between me and him, we talked him into going out.

The same thing with a lot of other people that were drunk. We'd get rid of them. We'd do fancy things. People would fall asleep at the table when they were drunk. We'd take their pie away. We would put an empty plate, wake them up and say, "Hey. You're all done". OK. And they'd take off and leave.

TG: Did you ever consider serving alcohol?

BC: No. Oh no. We didn't want no alcohol. (laughter) We even picked up a guy one time who was badly drunk and we couldn't wake him up. We couldn't wake him up. There was a truck driver who came in. He said, "Do you need a hand, Bob?" So, we picked him up, one under each arm. We walked outside. We sat him in a snowbank, and we watched. When he started to get cold, he got up. He didn't know which way to go. He walked up the street, down the street, up the street, down the street. Finally, he went one way and that was it. Stuff like that.

When somebody drunk would come in, I'd cook their pie in a hurry and cook it a little lighter than it should be just to get them out of there. If they were mouthy and stuff, we didn't put up with it.

TG: I've got a question for one of the big debates in Biddeford.

BC: Yeah.

TG: Does it really make a difference which oven your pizza is cooked in?
(laughter)

BC: It depends on the kind of pizza you buy. If you are buying a pizza with a few ingredients on it, it would be better in the old oven. The old oven has a dry heat. Now, you are an older person. Do you remember when your mother used to cook with a range oil?

TG: Yeah.

BC: And then she changed over to electric. Wasn't the meal a little bit different?

TG: Yeah.

BC: That's the difference. The texture is not quite the same when you have a dry heat. On the other side, the old oven they have the bricks, the pie will take a hair longer to cook but it was a dry heat. It would cook all the way through. This one here, it cooks in the bottom and the top at the same time. If you have a pie with a few ingredients on it, the middle stays not quite as cooked as it should be. It's a little bit soggy, like. Also, if you cook it in the new oven the pie will cool faster. By the time you get home, your pie will be cooled off a little bit. If you did it in the old oven, your pie will stay hotter longer. The heat is dry heat, and it stays hotter longer. That's a difference. I like the old oven because I can make that pie come out the way I want it to. If I want the pie to be crispier on the bottom, I can put it at a certain spot in the oven. If I want the top to cook more, I put it in another spot in the oven. This new oven, when it comes out, if you push it back in, you are going to get the bottom overcooked. If you try to get the top cooked more, you are going to get the bottom overcooked. So, you have to try to balance it in between. The other one, the old oven, you can make it do what you want. But you

need experience on the old oven to be able to do that. If you don't have the experience, you are better off on a conveyor.

TG: Interesting.

What has being from Biddeford meant to you?

BC: To me, I've gone a few times here and there. I haven't traveled much but I've gone to Tennessee once for vacation. I've gone to Vegas for a vacation. Once or twice, I've gone to Boston for different things.

I'll tell you, I like Biddeford because of the fact that it's quiet. You feel safer. It has all of the luxuries that you want if you want to leave town. Right now, Biddeford is building up a lot of little restaurants. Before that, if you wanted to go to Portland and have a nice meal, you could go to Portland and have a nice meal. If you wanted to have a nice show, you could get it out of Portland. If you really didn't mind fighting the traffic and this kind of stuff, you could also go to Boston which is just an hour away.

But yet, over here, you can walk the streets safely. You used to leave our doors unlocked until a few years back. We never locked our cars. We never worried about... I've got a generator that I want fixed. I don't dare leave it out in the yard as I'm worried somebody's going to take it. I'm waiting for the guy to pick it up. The guy was supposed to pick it up and he didn't pick it up, so I put it back in the garage. This is today.

In my days, when I was here, all this stuff was nice. Like I said, we'd go down Main Street and people were nice to you. You went into a store, and everybody

was always nice. Everybody was working to help you. Today, it's more like you are on your own.

TG: Growing up, did you speak French?

BC: Oh yeah. My wife and I used to speak French so much that when my boy went to school, we had him at St. Andre's. He had Simone. When Simone started to do what she was doing to me, we pulled him out of there. We brought him to Biddeford, the public school. When he went to public school, they told us, "Have his ears checked because he can't hear what the teacher is saying." All the time, it wasn't that he couldn't hear. It's just that he didn't speak English. He was speaking in French all of the time. So now, my boy doesn't even speak French at all because we started speaking in English at the house to get him to do that. So, he doesn't speak French at all. My mother had a hard time in English. My father did good but.

TG: Did you ever feel treated differently because you spoke French?

BC: No. Never treated differently. As a matter of fact, when we moved on the Pool Road, we were the only French family in the neighborhood. We had the guys across the street who were Yankees. They didn't speak French and we didn't speak English. We'd sit there and I'd teach them what we called a bottle or a house. We would tell them what it was in French. They would tell me what it was in English. We spent a year teaching each other the language so we could pick it up. I always got along very well with people no matter what.

TG: Who do you think was the single biggest influence in your life?

BC: My mother and father. They were the biggest influence in my life.

TG: It sounds like you really adopted their strong work ethic.

BC: Yeah. My father was a workaholic. My mother too. My mother would work in the house doing everything from the ironing, the washing of the floors. She was taking care of the 7 kids and then she'd come out in the garden and help us in the afternoon. She'd do some of the housework in the morning then in the afternoon, help us out in the garden until the sun got too hot. Then we'd all go back in. At nighttime, she'd do the canning. My mother would wake up my father at 4 in the morning. She'd stay up, get our school lunches ready and send us off to school in the morning. She'd be doing all of the housework and that stuff until we got home. She got supper ready and did all of the dishes. She worked until 11- 12 o'clock at night. Then she'd go back to bed, sleep 4 hours and get back up. She did that, 7 days a week. Seven days a week, she did that. She was a tough lady.

TG: She sounds it.

BC: She was hardly ever sick, hardly ever sick. Tough lady.

TG: What's it like being in the retirement phase of our life?

BC: I retired, and I didn't. I became my wife's helper (laughter). My wife wasn't feeling good. She's had 5 back operations. She is very restricted in a lot of things. When I retired, I've been taking care of the apartments here. I started doing the errands for her. I had a lot of stuff to catch up on over here. I started catching up

on the work that I wasn't able to do. I got caught up on all of this kind of work and then I started doing just the errands for her. As time went along, then I started to feel it. I've got arthritis in my knees. We were living upstairs. This year, we moved down here in February because I can't do the stairs anymore. My wife can't do the stairs because of her back. We had the place down here remodeled and fixed up.

TG: It must be nice to be able to remain in the home you've been in for so long.

BC: Yeah. I've been here for a long time. It's nice. When I bought this house, back then, it used to belong to St. Joseph's Parish.

TG: Really?

BC: Well, it didn't. It belonged to St. Joseph's. St. Joseph's sold it to Mr. Dion. Mr. Dion owned it for a couple of years. The place was really, really run down. The church never took care of it. They just collected the rent. The windows were ready to fall out. The guy, Mr. Dion, came in here and started doing some work. His wife said, "You are not going to spend your weekends over there, working all of the time." She put the place up for sale and I bought it. I got it from him. He had it maybe one or two years. I bought it.

TG: What year did you buy it?

BC: Oh. I can't remember now. My daughter was 5 years old. She is 53 now. So, it's 48 years. When I bought this house, it had no heating system. It needed a new roof.

TG: 1974?

BC: Yeah. Somewhere's in that vicinity. Like I said, the windows were falling out. There was no insulation. That's all I could afford. I bought basically as just a frame. I remodeled the two apartments on the side. I remodeled the one upstairs. I remodeled this one. Then, I rented them out. I've been keeping them up through the years. I didn't charge that much for rent and my tenants stayed for years. When they do leave, I go in and do a good job. One tenant that's leaving now, I'm putting in new floors in there and all of the modern stuff. We try to keep up. When I bought this, it wasn't much but it turned out to be good. But it was a lot of work. It was a lot of work

TG: What is something you'd like people to take away from your story?

BC: I just like them to think that especially when I was working, I was conscientious about my work as well as the customers. I wanted to make sure that I gave them a fair deal. I took care of the help as if it was my own kids. I never abused them. In other words, I'd like them to think that I was a kind person, fair and honest person. I wouldn't take anything from anybody, no matter what. We lived a good, honest life. A good religious life. I'm quite religious and my wife is the same thing. We lived a nice quiet, honest life. That's what I'd like to see them take from me.

TG: Is there anything you'd like to share that we didn't talk about, or I didn't ask?

BC: I can't think of anything. I think we covered just about everything. We did good.

TG: Thank you Bob. I really appreciate your time.

BC: I'm surprised that I was able to say that much (laughter)

