

Interviewer: Nicole Morin-Scribner (NMS)
Interviewee: Norman Sevigny (NS)
Present: Constance Sevigny, spouse
Date: Saturday, May 11, 2019
Place: Sevigny residence, Biddeford, Maine
Transcriber: Nicole Morin-Scribner

NMS: To get started, just to see if the sound level is fine, I wanted to ask you if you spell your name with a “d” or without a “d”.

NS: Without a “d”

NMS: What is the story behind without a “d”?

NS: Without a “d” is the way I was baptized. Norman P. Sevigny. In the old days, the nuns wanted to put a “d” on my name. That didn’t happen (laughter)

NMS: Did they tell you why they wanted to put a “d” on your name?

NS: Well, Normand, it would have been more French. That is the reason

NMS: It is Saturday, May 11, 2019. I’m Nicole Morin-Scribner and today I have the honor of interviewing Norman Sevigny at his home in Biddeford Maine. Thank you for agreeing to do this today. I wanted to get started by asking when and where were you born?

NS: I was born March 30, 1940 in Biddeford Maine

NMS: Were you born at home or at the hospital?

NS: At the hospital

NMS: Which hospital?

NS: Webber Hospital

NMS: Do you know who the doctor was at the time? Did they share that with you?

NS: No, I don’t remember the old days. That’s going years now.

NMS: Can you tell me something about your family? How did your parents end up in Biddeford?

NS: My dad was born in Biddeford. My mother was born in Victoriaville Canada. What happened is she moved over here and eventually they got to know each other. She was living with her cousin. In the old days, the parents would die young and she was taken in by her cousin so that's how they met. My dad was born in Biddeford back in 1914. That's going years.

NMS: Had his family been in Biddeford for a while?

NS: My grandfather was born in Biddeford. He was born in the 1890's and his dad was from somewhere in Quebec. The whole family came down. I showed you the picture.

NMS: Can you tell me something about your father's family? Was it a big family?

NS: No. There was only three, two boys and a girl

NMS: What did he do for work?

NS: My dad was a meat cutter. Eventually he owned the store, back in the 1950's. He went as far as 1998, so he had 48 years. That's a good chunk of years.

NMS: Do you know how he learned to be a meat cutter?

NS: Through some of his friends. In those days it was "off the hoof" [side of beef], not in meat boxes like today. What a difference.

NMS: How about your mother. Did she work?

NS: No. She was a homemaker. We had supervision all the time. She was home. Sometimes she worked at the store, but very seldom. We were brought up on Wentworth Street. We had a good neighborhood.

NMS: You have how many brothers and sisters?

NS: One brother

NMS: You said you grew up on Wentworth Street. Do you remember what you did as kids to have fun?

NS: We used to go play outside all of the time, in the fields. It wasn't like it is today with iPads and everything. We were out there playing games. We had a good neighborhood.

NMS: There were fields on Wentworth Street?

NS: Yes, there was. Not anymore. (Laughter)

NMS: That's what got my attention

NS: Not anymore. We were brought up at 48 Wentworth. I still remember who was living there between Union and Mason. In those we remembered because they stayed in their area for a long time. They no longer do that.

NMS: You said your mother was from Victoriaville. Did you keep a connection with your Canadian relatives?

NS: The Fecteau's were all brought up in Victoriaville. There were uncles and aunts, they were living there. Now they are no longer there. Its only cousins. We lost touch with them. It's not like it used to be.

NMS: Did you ever make a trip to Canada to visit your relatives?

NS: When I was young. I remember going to the creamery. "Les potteries"

NMS: What do you remember about that?

NS: I remember that night when we were there, we had a major thunderstorm. I was a kid. It wasn't funny.

NMS: Did they live in town? In the country?

NS: In town

NMS: Do you remember making the trip to Canada? Did you think it was far?

NS: It was far. In those days there were no fancy cars. It was an old car. We made it. That was good.

NMS: Did you speak French or English when you were growing up?

NS: French. I still speak French. You must notice my accent (laughter)

NMS: How about the rest of the neighborhood? When you were growing up, did they speak French?

NS: Yes. French mostly.

NMS: When the kids were outside playing...

NS: Most of us went to school at St. Joseph's and St. Louis. It was close by. It was close knit.

NMS: Do you remember what everyday life was like when you were a kid, living in that neighborhood?

NS: Played games. Played ball and pops. I couldn't believe it. Today you don't see it.

NMS: Did you have any family traditions that can remember? Like around the holidays?

NS: Oh yeah. Those were big. We used to visit aunts and uncles. Des Réveillons. [traditional Christmas Eve celebration]

NMS: Tell me about les Réveillons. What was that like?

NS: After Midnight Mass. Used to go to Aunt Melanie. She used to have some good Réveillons. We stayed up most of the night.

NMS: Any special foods?

NS: Tourtière [traditional Franco-American holiday pork pie]. Those were the good old days (laughter)

NMS: When you were growing up were there any special meals that were your favorites that your mom made for you?

NS: Des boulettes

NMS: What is a boulette?

NS: Pork and Hamburg rolled into a meatball, served with thick gravy and potatoes. Those were the days.

NMS: You said you went to St. Joseph's School. What do you remember about going to school at St. Joseph's?

NS: We had the nuns up to the fifth grade. Mere St. Rolande in the third grade and Mere St. Louise in the fifth grade. When I came out of fifth grade, I went to St. Louis. We had the brothers from Alfred. I went to school in the building across the street from the grammar school. Birch Street School.

NMS: Was it called St. Dominic's?

NS: No. It was part of St. Louis.

NMS: Were the boys and the girls in the same classes?

NS: No. We were in the same classes up to the fifth grade. From the fifth grade on, it was all boys. The girls were on one side and the boys on the other side.

NMS: How did they keep you apart?

NS: The doors. You must have seen those doors. (Laughter)

NMS: Was school in French or in English?

NS: Both. High school was mostly English. Only if you took French. But French never got away from me. It was mostly French in the house.

NMS: Do you remember when you started speaking English?

NS: I was at St. Joseph. Probably the second grade or third grade. Oh no, I skipped the second grade. There was the primary and then the third grade. There were so many kids they had to switch them around.

NMS: You skipped?

NS: Yes. It was the second grade. I remember because the third grade was Mere St. Rolande. The little short lady, nun. Yeah.

NMS: That's interesting that you skipped that grade.

NS: That's the way it was in those days

NMS: Did everybody get to do that?

NS: No. Some would follow the years.

NMS: Do you know how you were chosen?

NS: I don't know. We never found out. It just happened that my name came up and I was shipped to the third grade.

NMS: Do you remember how you felt about that?

NS: A class is a class (laughter)

NMS: It didn't bother you that you were leaving your other friends behind?

NS: No. I made some other friends. The kids we went to school with, we'd hang around with the same kids all the time from our area. We didn't have transportation, so we stayed in our area most of the time.

NMS: Most of the kids in the neighborhood

NS: In our neighborhood. There were plenty of kids too.

NMS: So, there were a lot of children.

NS: In our area, yes.

NMS: Did all of the kids in your neighborhood go to St. Joseph's?

NS: Most of them. Very few didn't.

NMS: Those that didn't, where did they go?

NS: St. Mary's or Biddeford Public Schools.

NMS: Tell me about the relationship between those who went to St. Joseph's and those who went to Biddeford or St. Mary's.

NS: No problem. We just mingled. It was good.

NMS: From St. Joseph's you went to St. Louis

NS: Yes. I did my four years at St. Louis

NMS: Were there sports back then?

NS: Oh, big time!

NMS: Big time? Tell me about that.

NS: It started when Mr. Cote took over as coach. We had Mr. Regina as a coach but he ran a single wing offense. When Mr. Cote took over the football team, he went to the T formation offense. The T Formation was a fast... you just hit and run. While a single wing you run... and by the time you ran around the corner, the guy would go by. It wasn't like the T Formation. Mr. Cote was a good coach. I'd play for Mr. Cote anytime.

NMS: So, you played football

NS: That was the only sport I played, and I had fun

NMS: Do you remember what kind of record the football had when you played?

NS: My senior year we had a 9-1 record. The only team we lost to was Thornton Academy. That was a rivalry then.

NMS: Tell me about the football rivalries. What was that like?

NS: You hated to lose but somebody had to lose.

NMS: Do you remember what it was like the day or the night before the game?

NS: Oh yes.

NMS: What was that like?

NS: It was on the rough side as we wanted to win so bad against Thornton Academy. Yes, I can remember that.

NMS: What were the fans like?

NS: Biddeford had big fans. One of them was a fireman. He had a temper as a fan. He went on the field because he didn't like the refs. Those were the good old days.

NMS: Is there any game in particular when you played that really stands out in your memory?

NS: No. About the same. I was a defensive linebacker. I had fun. I'd rather play defense then offense. On offense, sometimes you get massacred. (laughter)

NMS: I read a newspaper article about did the players speak French to each other?

NS: Oh yeah. Why not? We had the advantage (laughter)

NMS: Did anybody ever pick up on that?

NS: Especially against Cheverus, the Irishmen. They didn't understand French. That was good. We had a tool.

NMS: So, you used that to your advantage.

NS: Yes.

NMS: Tell me what it was like when you were a teenager during those days. What did you guys do for fun when you were in high school?

NS: We would go to the Puritan. When you were the driver, you would go down Main Street and make some noise. There were no police cars in the city then. Today they've got a dozen. Those were the good old days. She remembers (pointing to his wife) She was at the Puritan too. That's not where I met her though.

NMS: When did you get married?

NS: 1962. September 3, 1962

NMS: Tell me about how you met your wife

NS: I met my wife at my friend's wedding. On our first date, I took her to the movie theater in Portland and I don't know what happened, but I slept through the movie (laughter). Ask her, she'll tell you.

NMS: That's a way to make a great first impression.

NS: Yes (laughter)

NMS: You had a car to go to Portland?

NS: Yes, I did. I worked at the store. I accumulated some money. I was one of the few in those days who had a car. It was the kind you had to shift.

NMS: Going to Portland was one of the things people did?

NS: Yes

NMS: Were there dances?

NS: Dances at the Parish Hall. Dances at The Lightning. I went mostly to the Parish Hall. But then the Parish Hall folded, and we went to The Lightning, which was on top of St. Jean's Hall at the corner of Main and Elm.

NMS: What were the dances like at St. Joe's (Parish Hall). Were there live bands?

NS: No. It was all DJ's. Same thing with Lightning. Lightning had a few live bands, very seldom though.

NMS: Tell me about what your thought process was after you graduated from high school.

NS: I went to work at the store. I was in the army. In 1960 I joined the army, the army national guard. For six months I did the training. They shipped me back home and I was in the national guard for five and a half years. I did my duty, what terms I had with them.

NMS: Did you end up going anywhere other than stateside?

NS: I went as far as Kentucky and that was it. I do know others who were shipped out to Germany.

NMS: When you went to Kentucky was that the first time you were away from Biddeford?

NS: Yes

NMS: What was that like?

NS: It was nice. We had three inches of snow back in Kentucky and we were quarantined to the barracks. Us Mainers, we thought that was funny.

NMS: As you were growing up, especially when you went away to Kentucky, did you ever feel like you were treated differently because of your background or your accent?

NS: No. The outfit where I was had different nationalities, different colors. Most of my barracks were all people who had joined the national guards. We were treated alright. It was an experience.

NMS: That makes me think. I know you said when you were growing up most of the kids in your neighborhood were French. As you grew older, did you connect with people in Biddeford who were not of Franco background?

NS: When I was playing football, we had Irish, we had different nationalities. St. Louis had a good variety of people. It was a good experience.

NMS: I forgot to ask you. What role did church play as you were growing up?

NS: In those days, everybody would go to church and follow and be part of it. I was an altar boy. Church was every Sunday. Religion was taught in our school. But today, it's different. The kids today, they question. We didn't question. We followed in the parents' footsteps. Today, the kids don't participate.

NMS: Was St. Joseph's Parish the one that you were members of?

NS: Yes. St. Joseph's Parish

NMS: Did you ever go to mass at St. Andre's or St. Mary's?

NS: Yes. I got married at St. Andre's and remained in St. Andre's Parish until they closed in 2010.

NMS: Because I've heard some stories about Irish Catholics and French-Canadian Catholics

NS: You belonged to the parish in the area of Biddeford that parish covered. I grew up on the side of town that attended St. Joe's. When I got married, I lived on the St. Andre's side of town.

On State Street, where you were brought up, there were a lot of Irish in your area. The people who owned your house were Kenney. What was her name? I still remember the dad.

NMS: So that neighborhood?

NS: Yes. Right next door were the Sullivans, then the McAuliffes, the Kellehers, the Sullivans, the Readys and so forth. There were lots of Irish in your area, Bradbury Street and the neighborhood where we had the grocery store.

NMS: And they were parishioners of ...

NS: St Mary's. The Ten Commandments, there were a lot of Irish in those days. Then, the French people gradually came into the neighborhood, blended and took over. The French who moved into the neighborhood went to St. Joseph's.

NMS: I know what the Ten Commandments are, can you explain what they are?

NS: In those days, the mills built those. They built ten houses the same and called them commandments. The ten commandments of the church. Then the seven commandments of the church were on South Street.

NMS: The Ten Commandments were located on what street?

NS: Bradbury Street.

NMS: And you are saying at some point that was primarily Irish?

NS: Yes. Irish and Polish. There were a couple of Polish families. The second house in. Where the old Credit Union is today, it was a Polish family there.

NMS: After you graduated from high school, had you only worked at the store?

NS: No

NMS: That's the only job you ever had?

NS: No. I worked at Delorge's Bakery for a couple of summers while in high school. Then I went to work at the store with my dad. I later went to work for Shaw's in 1998.

NMS: If I back up a little bit, can you tell me something about the history of the store?

NS: My dad worked in that store in 1933 when he was in high school. When he got laid off from Saco Lowell Shop back in 1950, the store was for sale, so he bought the store. We've been there for 48 years until it closed in 1997.

NMS: Do you know how long it had existed?

NS: Since the 1920's. It was a fellow named Dupont if I'm not mistaken, then John McCauley took over. My dad worked for him back in 1933. Then he went to

apprentice school for Saco Lowell. Then he got laid off and took over the store. That's the story about Sevigny's Market. 1950 to 1997.

NMS: When you first started working there, do you remember how old you were?

NS: Ten

NMS: Ten?

NS: In those days you could do that.

NMS: What did you do there when you were ten?

NS: Stock the shelves, deliver. In those days it was within walking distance, so we would help the people bring their goods home.

NMS: Really?

NS: Yes

NMS: Tell me about that. You used to do home deliveries.

NS: Yes. A lot. In those days, the population around the store was getting old and we used to deliver right to the house.

NMS: Did you enjoy working there?

NS: Yes. It was fun until the 1980's until the credit cards started coming out. Then it was a different ballgame.

NMS: You started out by doing deliveries and stocking shelves. How gradually did you change what you were doing there?

NS: Well, I took over the whole thing back in 1977.

NMS: Your father worked there until...

NS: I took over in 1977 and he worked with us for a while. He would winter in Florida, return to visit with us in the summer and work in the meat department. He

enjoyed working and connecting with his customers. He did that until 1986. He passed away in 1991 at the age of 77.

NMS: Did he used to say he found it difficult to pass the reigns and let you take over?

NS: He missed the people. That's what happens with a corner store. When you sell or get away from it, you tend to lose contact with people. I was lucky when I went to Shaws.

NMS: Did you go to Shaws after the store closed?

NS: Yes. 1998. I got done at Easter and three weeks after I was working at Shaws.

NMS: Going back to being at the store, was it pretty much just the people who lived in the neighborhood who went to the store?

NS: No. Some people from throughout the city because we used to advertise.

NMS: Must be that people would share. You got to know some of them pretty well.

NS: Yes, or relatives. It was fun.

NMS: Did people used to tell you stories about what was going with them at the time?

NS: Yes, people would share their personal stories...some good, some sad. The store was a place to shop and also connect with their neighbors. Then, there were the politicians (laughter).

NMS: So that was a stop for people who were looking to...

NS: They used to vote next door, at the school, in those days. Nothing like today where everything is under one roof. There used to be a big Ward, Ward 7. There used to be a lot of people from throughout the back country. Anything from Main Street all the way to Alfred Road, used to be Ward 7. So, there was a big ward then.

NMS: And when they were in the neighborhood, they'd come to the corner store?

NS: Yeah. They used to.

NMS: You must have gotten to know whole families in the neighborhood.

NS: Definitely. Descendants from descendants to descendants. One thing too is when the shoe shop was going, we'd be busy. A lot of the people who worked at the shoe shop lived in that area.

NMS: For the record, that shoe shop is the one on...

NS: State Street.

NMS: So, when the shoe shop was open, that gave you more business.

NS: Yes. But they had their downs and ups. A shoe shop is not 52 weeks a year. They've got time when they are busier than other times.

NMS: Did people used to do all of their grocery shopping there?

NS: We were a full line grocery store so some of them did. The ones without a car, especially. Many of our customers would stop in every day on their way to or from work.

You didn't have the stores you have today. You've got Market Basket, that wasn't around. Even Shaws. When we were in business, you had A&P, First National and Edwards Market in those days. Then Shaws came in, then Hannaford. Nothing like today. You have big stores like Market Basket.

NMS: How did you compete back in those days? What drew people to come to the corner store?

NS: It was service. I would say that you get one-on-one service that you don't get in the supermarket where you're just a number. We had weekly specials that brought people into the store. In those days, when people didn't have cars, you shopped at your corner store.

NMS: I bet you knew the names of a lot of people

NS: Yes. By name.

NMS: You must have a really good memory for remembering peoples' names

NS: Yes, I did. But now, I'm losing some (laughter)

NMS: I was impressed that you remembered me. I haven't seen you for a long time.

NS: Yes. Don't you have a sister too?

NMS: Yes. Talk about a memory. I guess your memory is still really good.

NS: Well I hope so. (Laughter)

NMS: What was your favorite part about the work that you did at the store?

NS: Being in contact with the people.

NMS: You must have gotten to know the joys that they were experiencing, some of the challenges that they were experiencing. You got to know their personal stories?

NS: Personal stories, yes.

NMS: Are there any in particular that stand out?

NS: No. They'd be all about the same.

NMS: Through time, you were talking about the shoe shop where it was up and down, part of the story of Biddeford is that some of the major employers were up and down.

NS: Up and down, even the mill.

NMS: What was it like, for example, when the mill shut down.

NS: When the mill was slow, the economy was slow.

NMS: How did that effect the business?

NS: It would affect the business. They'd be more careful. When everything is going full blast, they'd spend. They'd buy things they wouldn't otherwise.

NMS: Did they ever buy anything on credit?

NS: Oh yes. That was my downfall.

NMS: Tell me about how that worked back then?

NS: As an example, the people who worked in the shoe shop were typically the best ones. They made sure they paid their bills. Weekly, weekly, weekly. When things changed around like back in the 1980's when credit cards came in, they'd forget me. They'd pay their credit cards, but they'd forget me.

NMS: Tell me about how that worked? It wasn't like now when you go to a store, you pay right away for what you are getting. What was it like back then?

NS: They would have a charge account.

NMS: How did that work?

NS: Well, you're asking a sour subject. (Laughter) Some customers charged and would pay their balance every week or once a month. Sometimes people who needed help asked for credit and I would say, "Yes." Sometimes they would pay back, but sometimes I would never see them again. I always felt it was best to help someone in need. Some people took advantage of my kindness.

NMS: I mean the mechanics of it because that doesn't exist now.

NS: No. It doesn't. Credit cards. They charge all they want on a credit card.

NMS: Back when you were running the store, if someone came in and they wanted to get something, you...

NS: They charge. You gave them a slip and you kept one. So, this way you'd have a book with their names on it. You go by the numbers. That was a subject. I was too nice. I got burned.

NMS: So, people would come and buy something, you would write it down and pay you periodically.

NS: For example, most of the people in the shoe shop would pay the full amount every week. Then you had people on Social Security who were charging by the month. They'd pay it. They were good. They were faithful. But some of them...my fault.

NMS: We were talking about the store. Things changed over time. Do you remember when you stopped that approach of people keeping a ledger?

NS: It never stopped until I closed.

NMS: Tell me about when you made the decision to close the store. What led you to...

NS: Getting fed up. I said, "I've got to be out of here."

NMS: Your biggest frustration was people not paying.

NS: Yes. And shoplifting. That's the bottom of it. If I was back in business, there would be no charge at all. It would be cash or credit card because the credit card pays right off.

NMS: Did you ever talk to some of the other corner stores?

NS: They are all the same. I hear from other people. I was talking to Roger Hurtubise. You probably know Roger Hurtubise, he's the one that has that French station in Sanford, 104.3. That's another one you should interview. He'd be good. His father-in-law had a store. We talked about it. He did the same thing as I did.

NMS: When you were running the store, did the owners of the other stores ever get together?

NS: No. Each corner store was individual. We never incorporated, by that I mean every so often have a meeting and bring up these situations. We never did. Everybody was for themselves.

NMS: Was it difficult to make that change?

NS: No. I went to Shaws right off.

NMS: You were able to sell the store? Did it continue as a business?

NS: No. I closed it period.

NMS: Then what happened to the property?

NS: It stayed empty until it the owner tore down the building. That building was old. I'd do all the repairs. It was a double expense because you'd pay rent, do the repairs, pay for the goods. Because it was an old building there was always something happening. I did myself a favor when I locked the door.

NMS: You did sell it so somebody else bought it.

NS: No. The Perron boys owned it.

NMS: Oh, you were renting?

NS: Yes. We only rented the store part of the building.

NMS: Was it difficult for you when the decision was made to actually tear it down?

NS: No. I was happy the building was gone. There were a lot of memories. Now I don't have those memories when I go by. Now when I go by, it's gone. I had some good memories. Some of the people were excellent, couldn't ask for better. It's the ones that took advantage of me that still disappoint me.

NMS: It must have been different when you went from being your own boss and running your own business to go work at Shaws. Did you find that a difficult transition?

NS: No. It was easy for me because before, I had to do all the work. There was no one in back of you. Over there, there are so many people running different areas of the business. I just had to focus on working in the meat department.

NMS: Going down a different path a little bit, tell me about your family. You shared how you were married, and you stayed in Biddeford. Have you ever been tempted to leave Biddeford?

NS: No. No (laughter). We had four children, three girls and a boy. The furthest is in Beverly Mass. I have a daughter and son who live in Saco, another in Old Orchard. We don't actually have anyone living in Biddeford now, but they are in the vicinity. They all went to Biddeford High School. They did well because they studied. The boy is doing good. He is a fireman/paramedic in Biddeford.

NMS: Do they speak French at all?

NS: They understand some, more than they can speak it. How about your children? Do they understand?

NMS: They understand some.

You've lived through some interesting things that happened in the community like, for example, you went to St. Louis and then it closed.

NS: Never should have happened. Never, never!

NMS: What stage of your life were you at when they closed St. Louis?

NS: 1970, I was 30 years old.

NMS: Do you remember how you felt when you heard the news?

NS: I couldn't believe it. To this day, look what happened in Lewiston, St. Dom. The person that left them that kind of money made sure that the bishop wouldn't spend any of that money in any areas but build the school. We didn't have that powerful person in Biddeford that would do it, that would say to the bishop "You are not going to do it". And the bishop came from out of state. He didn't care about Biddeford Maine.

So, you went to school there until what year?

NMS: I was there when it closed

NS: 1970. You graduated in what year?

NMS: 1972. I went to Biddeford afterwards.

So even though you were out of school at the time, when you heard the news that was difficult.

NS: Because we had something good going. And you learned a lot. The brothers were good teachers.

NMS: During the 1970's was also the time of the Vietnam War. Do you remember how that affected you while that was going on?

NS: I had been released from the Guards in 1966 so it didn't really affect me directly. It never should have happened. That's the way I feel about it. There never should have been a war. Because it was politics.

NMS: Were you aware of people being drafted at the time? Is that anything that ever concerned you?

NS: I would have been drafted back in 1960 but I joined the Guard. I did my time and I'm not sorry I did it that way.

NMS: Another major event that happened during that general time period is, do you remember when President Kennedy was assassinated?

NS: I do remember. 1962. That's the year we got married.

NMS: Where were you that day? Do you remember where you were?

NS: I think I was at the store.

NMS: You think you were at the store. Do you remember what that was like?

NS: Everybody was shocked.

NMS: Do you remember people coming into the store and talking about it?

NS: Oh yes. That was a real bad subject.

NMS: Some other events that happened in Biddeford, there were some big fires.

NS: Grafton. Hooper Street. Remember those? We used to go to the fires to watch. I didn't give her (his wife) a chance to put a jacket on. It was cold. I said "We've got to go! We've got to go! [watch the firemen fight the fire]"

NMS: Were you at the store?

NS: No. Not for Grafton. But I was at the store, it was on a Saturday afternoon for Hooper Street. I was at the store then.

NMS: What do you remember about that?

NS: The fire was a monster. It burnt all the houses on the street. You could see the flames from the store.

NMS: Did you get involved with it at all?

NS: No. It really displaced a lot of people. It was sad. People work all their life and they lose everything in 10 minutes.

NMS: On a different topic, there are a number of different organizations in the community. Have you ever been involved?

NS: I was involved with la Kermesse as a director. When my kids were in school at St. Andre's, my wife and I also volunteered with the PFTA (Parent Friends Teachers Association). We hosted dinners and holiday events including New Year's Eve dances.

NMS: Can you tell me from your perspective what the goal of la Kermesse was.

NS: The goal was to build a Franco-American Heritage Center in Biddeford so our ancestors' story would be told and shared with many generations to come.

NMS: La Kermesse was more than just the one weekend?

NS: It was year-round. We'd be planning year-round. I still make the pork pies and cretons for them.

I was in charge of fireworks. I got it going with city representatives.

NMS: It must be a challenge when you see that it's not continuing.

NS: You go over there now and the crowds are so few, so few compared to back in the 1980's when Mr. Plamondon had the great idea of putting on la Kermesse.

NMS: Were you there at the time he was trying to convince people to take this on?

NS: No. I was after him. But one of the great workers, he wasn't a physical worker, he was a mental worker, he knew all the connections. Who to get. That was Dick Martin. That was the reason behind the Martin Center on Alfred Street that's named after him. That was great. We had some good people.

NMS: And part of the challenge is probably keeping the Franco-American part

NS: Yes

NMS: One of the things you've mentioned a number of times is the St. Louis Alumni Association. So, you are active in that?

NS: I'm not active but I'm a member. Everybody is a member that graduated from St. Louis. The girls are taking over now. That's great. They've got ideas. They are going to get that going. That was a good way of getting the alumni on the right track again because the old timers are departing. They don't want to but with time.

NMS: How are you finding this phase of your life. You're retired now?

NS: Retired. I'm 79. I worked until 70 at Shaws. I was there almost 15 years. It was a good experience.

NMS: When you were at Shaws were you able to establish personal relationships like you did at the store?

NS: Definitely. They used to come and see me at the meat department. They used to call it "off the turnpike Sevigny's Market". (Laughter). Mr. Danton was the Store Manager. I had a good relationship with him and everybody.

NMS: Were there any other organizations that you were active with?

NS: No. That was it. Kermesse was the only one. That took a lot of time in those days. Because you really wanted to be part of it. I only took care of the kitchen and the fireworks. That was enough.

NMS: Did you still have the store at that time or were you at Shaws?

NS: I was at the store, yes.

NMS: Those must have been long days. You probably put a lot of hours in at the store.

NS: The weekend when we had the festival, I had to get someone to take over. That wasn't funny sometimes.

NMS: Did your family ever work at the store?

NS: Yes. All my kids worked in the store at some point. Most through their high school and college years.

NMS: Have you ever been tempted to leave Biddeford?

NS: No

NMS: What keeps you here?

NS: I guess the environment, friends. I never, never thought of leaving Biddeford. Its where my ancestors are. Its where I'm going to be.

NMS: How would you encourage others to make a life in Biddeford? What brings them here you think?

NS: Back in our years, there were a lot of people that left. Especially in the mid 1950's. A lot of them left for Connecticut. I guess that was the place to go because there was a lot of work. But things have changed. There are a lot of companies that re-settled in Biddeford and the young ones tend to realize that Maine is a great state to live in. Back in our days, we didn't have the Pratt Whitney. The Navy Yard was there but not as big as it is today. Then you've got Portland, that's growing by leaps and bounds. You've got all the restaurants in Biddeford that you never had before. We had the one restaurant, Wonderbar. Or the Puritan. Do you remember the Puritan? (Laughter).

NMS: So, you would say from your perspective that Biddeford is definitely a place to consider.

NS: Yes. The area. We have the beaches. What else do you want?

NMS: What is something you'd want to make sure that people take away from hearing your story?

NS: Biddeford has changed through the years, but it will always be a special place to me.

NMS: When you think back about your life in Biddeford so far, what has being from Biddeford meant to you?

NS: Great things. I met my wife. Got married. 57 years that's good. It doesn't happen today.

NMS: Is there anything else that you wanted to share that I didn't ask?

NS: No. You covered mostly everything.

NMS: Well I thank you.

NS: You're welcome

