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MF026 Islands and Bridges: Communities of Memory in Old Town, Maine

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July 2023

## Patrick “Leo” Lagasse, interviewed by Carol Nichols, Part 2

Patrick Lagasse

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ACCESSION SHEET  
Maine Folklife Center

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Collection Number: 026

Interviewer Carol Nichols  
/Depositor:

Narrator: Patrick (Leo) Lagasse

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**Description:** 2770 Patrick (Leo) Lagasse, interviewed by Carol Nichols, June 4 or 6, 1993, at his home in Westbrook, Maine. 15 page partial transcript. Lagasse talks about his memories of French Island; nicknames; French and the French Island school; factory and mill work; Great Depression; dairy farming and milk as part of the daily diet; cutting ice from the Penobscot River; lumberyard on Hildreth Street; polio; Benoit Bouchard and Herbert Gray School; children's and adult's entertainment; grocery stores; Great Depression and WPA work; Old Town airport; Monday wash day; boxing matches; plumbing and the first bathtub on French Island; automobiles; Prohibition, homebrew, and bootleggers; shining shoes at the University of Maine; and World War Two. Tapes: C 1498 - C 1499

**Restrictions:** Restrictions expired. See letter from James Bishop.

**Formats:** Two sixty-minute cassette tapes and 15 page partial transcript.

**Related  
Collections /  
Accessions**

C. 1498, 1499

1:50 p.m.

INTERVIEW WITH PATRICK (LEO) LAGASSE  
IN HIS HOME IN WESTBROOK, MAINE  
INTERVIEWER: CAROL NICHOLS

~~2431 341~~

PL Patrick Lagasse  
CN Carol Nichols

CN OK. The first thing I'd like to know is what it was like--  
what  
are your first memories of French Island.

PL Well, I have to correct one thing first. People will know me  
as Patou... because my name was Leo and I was nicknamed by  
everyone, and I have no idea why I was ever nicknamed Patou.  
But it appeared that everyone in our family had a nickname of  
some kind, and I believe that the only two that were ever  
called by their name was... well I can't hardly remember, I  
think it was after we left... it might have been the last one  
Marie and Con... who I think had a middle name of Adeline. I  
don't know why it was Con... but I thought it was Constance  
for a middle name... but we all had a middle name of Joseph...  
But anyway, getting away from the name. Everyone will know me  
as the person who was named Patou Lagasse. As I say,  
everyone... not just in our family... but most of French  
Island had nicknames, and some of the nicknames would not be  
printable for this program. But everyone had nicknames so  
they remember me as Patou Lagasse. The early years of my  
life, that I remember, were the years probably that I can go  
back to and really relate to was Kindergarden. That was at  
the school on French Island, as it was called, because it was  
truely French. People started in those days, English was the  
second language. Because, most of the kids on French Island  
were French. We had one street that was called Little Canada,  
because I think that was when they first came from Canada  
that's where they migrated. The kids grew up and married and  
spread out over the Island but it was all French... pretty  
much. As kids started school that was their first language.  
Growing up on the Island was all people who worked in the  
factories and mills... the woolen mills, the paper mills, and  
the shoe shops which were started in the 30s by... I can't  
remember the name of the people now... but I guess they are  
still running the shoe shops. He started that in the  
Depression days on Water Street in Old Town, and I think he  
had 20 or 25 people working there handstitching moccasins...  
and my mother was one of them.

CN Where did your father work?

PL My father in those days, it was the Depression days, but he  
had been a farmer all his life at a big dairy farm, in fact,  
in the country. That was where I was born. The first farm...  
we called it up in Pea Cove. He had a dairy farm, and he used  
to sell milk through the people in Old Town, with a horse and

wagon. And my half-brothers were the people who used to drive the wagon. And sometimes they would come home with the money and sometimes they would party with the money. So, that was his way of life until 1929... well, before '29, because he sold the farm, and moved and built the house that we lived in and most all the children were born in after myself... were born in the house at 82 Bodwell Street.

CN Was it a farm then too? Was that house a farm?

PL No. You could have called it a farm because he took a lot of his farm animals with him. Today's zoning ordinances we have... not any of those things would have been allowed. He had horses, cows, pigs, chickens and manure piles. The neighbors were close but they weren't close enough to complain, because he was allowed to do all these things. He did a lot of this type of thing to subsidize the family budget obviously. We had our own milk, no refrigerator... CN What did you do for refrigeration? PL We had none. We just put it in the pantry, in the shed there. They used to call it the pantry. That was the same way on the farm. You'd milk the cow in the morning and you'd put the milk, and the cream would separate it, and put it in the pantry where it was cool. And we drank the daily milk, and that was part of our daily sustenance. So, the first time I tasted ice milk was... I can remember I was at a neighbor's house, and they had a refrigerator that was refrigerated with ice that Mr. Richards used to cut on the Penobscot River and peddle every day, for five cents to ten cents a cake depending on what your size cake you wanted. CN Mr. Richards? What's his first name? PL We used to call him... oh, Angus, Angus Richards. There were a lot of Richards. Angus Richards I believe was the Richards family, the one that run the market on French Island later. Then we had two Richards who lived... I can't remember his real name... here we go for nicknames... it wasn't just kids it was grownups that had nicknames. There were quite a few Richards, Landry, St. Louis, Lagasse and Fourniers, and Cotes and Geroux. There were only two Geroux families that I can remember. But these were the names that we had on French Island.

CN That's very interesting. Where would he get the ice. You said he got the ice along the river?

PL Well, in those days we used to swim in that river, and it was really... you could drink the water, in fact, from that river. We'd swim in the river. He cut his ice right off the river bank where his house was off... I believe it was Hildreth Street, because it was named after a Mr. Hildreth who had a big lumber yard that stretched all the way from Bosworth Street to almost the end of Hildreth Street. I think there were two homes on that street at the time on the right hand side. Other than the houses that were on Bodwell Street. But, on Hildreth Street there was one corner house here on the

ledge and then his office buildings and then a big lumberyard. He had three lumber buildings and a lumberyard full of lumber that went all the way into our back yard. I mean our front yard where my mother used to hang our clothes. So that street was pretty much all the lumberyard.

CN Did people from the Island work there at the mill?

PL That mill, I don't recall exactly how the lumber came into the lumberyard, whether it was bought and the processed at other spots. But, I know there was lumber stacked right up to our clothesline. It was... he had people who would finish some work in some of the buildings. There weren't too many people from the Island that worked at the lumberyard. Mostly, the people on the Island, as I can remember it, were manual labor... hardly any skilled labor. They all worked in the paper mills and the shoe shops and the woolen mills.

CN Can you talk a little bit about the school on French Island? Like what first grade or kindergarden was like?

PL Yes. Those were really fun years as I remember them, because it was always... we went to school in the morning and a group of kids all happy to be together from playing from the day before after school, or playing in the evening in the neighborhood. We looked forward to getting up and going to school in the mornings. We walked to school as a group. In fact, it was a very enjoyable time, because it seemed like it was just an extension of getting together again and enjoying each other. It was enjoyable because for the first... of course, I started the kindergarden there and then moved away. But, I can recall the kindergarden days... the big room, and the one teacher, and all the kids pasting things on a piece of paper, pasting that on a piece of paper, speaking in French. And sometimes the teacher would just smile, and pat you on the back and "good job" as much as I can remember. But it was fun days. Recess times we had what today would be considered real dangerous on the playgrounds... we had big old iron swings with chains that they used to let the boys in the big grades, fifth and sixth grades, they would excuse them five minutes before recess time so they could hang the chains up on the fence for us to use the swings. And then five minutes after recess they'd take them down and bring them in the schoolhouse because they didn't want a child to be hurt while there was no one observing them because they were all iron and chains. It would probably be a very, considered dangerous today. Every once in awhile one would get hit with the swing but it was a learning time, and we'd stay away from where it was dangerous. But it was fun.

CN Who were some of your early childhood friends?

PL Well, my childhood friends who became later friends ... that was another interesting time in my life. My early friends



were Leo Morancy, Louise Cyr, Cathleen Beaulieu, who's brother now is Justice Beaulieu in the Supreme Court, and, I guess he's in the Superior Court. And, St. Louis... what was her name? I can't remember her name. She had one of the earlier polio diagnosis on the Island. She had a real stiff leg and walked with a brace for many years. CN Was there a bad polio outbreak on the Island? PL No. In those days the polio vaccine hadn't been... it was a disease, well not a disease but an illness that was very crippling, and in her case it left her with a stiff leg. Talk about the polio, in my later years these people... the interesting story that I want to tell you was. Later we had a schoolteacher who had polio, Mr. Bouchard, Benny Bouchard, who I believe is still living in Old Town. He was the fifth and sixth grade teach... he was a sixth grade teacher in the Herbert Gray School, and he for some reason made some arrangements with the public school system where he took five of... six of us from the French Island School to go to Herbert Gray School. This is probably the first type of busing for poor kids to the better schools that I can remember. They speak about it today, "Let's bus these kids from the poor section across town." But he used to drive us every day, morning and noon, if we didn't take a little lunch... if it was bad days we took a lunch. Morning and noon, he'd drive the six of us to Herbert Gray School to be in his grade the sixth grade. It was the greatest thing that I can remember because of what he accomplished. From the six children that he brought to the Herbert Gray School, one of them became the town manager of Wischester County... I think it was Rye, New York. He was town manager of Rumford, Maine for many years but was selected as one of the prominent cities in Weschester County. Louise Cyr became a nurse, and the other lady that I can remember the girl that time... was Josaphine Geroux. Cathleen Beaulieu, I don't know where she went out in life. And Cecile St. Louis was her name, and myself. We all eventually other than one person attended college, and so it was a successful venture for Mr. Bouchard. If I can remember one person well, I remember him very, very much.

CN That's nice. Were you treated any differently... having been to the French Island School, and then going over to sixth grade?

PL Well, we had an ally because the teacher was from French Island. So, he mingled us in real well. I can remember I was sitting in one row and another person was sitting over, we were not all grouped together, which was probably something that he had already thought of in his mind. It was well thought out, well planned, because we mingled quite well. It didn't appear to me that there was any prejudice of any kind. And, we did meet a lot of... I met a lot of people from the other side of town. The Harris'. Marjorie Harris who was a very, very talented in expression in her English class. I always got quite a kick out of that even as a child. And it

stayed with me for quite awhile, just that experience. There were people who were different than I was, and it gave me quite a start in life.

CN What kind of games did you play after school with your buddies?

PL In those days, if it was warm we went swimming. That was one of the free recreations... the river was there, it was very easy to get to, and it was clean. If it was cool, we'd play games like today would be... I don't know if it would still be recognized Odd or Evil. I don't know what it even means. But we used to try to... I know everyone who had an area on French Island that was bigger than 50 x 50 feet we used to play these type games, and run up and down the lawn until they chased us off, and that was part of the fun I believe... seeing how far we could get before they chased us off. I remember Mr. Maurice Langalis who had one of the best lawns on French Island. It was just about over the hill, and he had one good-sized yard, and it was always kept nice. We'd say, "Let's go play in his yard tonight." That was part of the fun... just to see... it wouldn't probably be more than 7 or 8 kids as a group. But, every neighborhood had a group together that could play... almost like family.

CN We talked a little bit about rivalries on the Island... different sections of the Island having gangs... kind of what you'd call gangs? Did you notice any of that?

PL I didn't notice the different parts of... because, mostly as I grew up was the neighborhood that you were in... there were enough friends and children to play. Because, every family on French Island at the time that I remember, had families of... if you had less than five children you were an awful small family. And so, every neighborhood... in fact the street I lived on had 7 or 8 houses, and there was probably 40 or 50 kids on the street. Where, today, I go back to visit, and my goodness you don't see a child on the street any longer... it's changed so much.

CN Did you play with your brothers and sisters much, or did you play more with others?

PL Brothers and sisters was when it was... the weather was not right and you had to stay inside. But, that was very seldom. Because, even in the coldest of weather I can remember it would be by streets more than anything. Every once in awhile someone would wander over from another street, but it was mostly groups by street. It was almost like family. Every street was a family. And we would, say in the wintertime, we would start at the top of our hill on Bodwell Street, and when I was the youngest that's where we would start to slide. As you grew older than you would venture all the way to the top of the hill, which was Bosworth Street and you could slide in either direction to the river without worrying about

automobiles. But that's when you would... by that time you were a little bit older, 11 or 12 years old. But to begin with the children... the younger ones would start from the top of the hill from my house at 82 Bodwell Street and slide to the bottom. No... Automobiles and things were... you could almost count them on your hands who owned a car. It was either a person who was in business or a person who was... we didn't have too many professional people, but we did have people who ran markets... there was Landry's Market, and there was the First National Store, there was the T&K Store, and I guess there was Gerard's Market which was... I can't remember them people's name now. They had a little market there for many years right there where St. Louis' market was before that it was... we used to call it Gerard's, but he worked for... I think it was a... Isn't that awful... I can't remember that name.)

CN Which store was the store that your family went to?

PL We traded at the First National Store and the T&K Store. Because the T&K Store, I can remember my brother worked there. He was 12/13 years old. A man by the name of Ralph Marquis who lived way down the other end of French Island towards the... I believe it's Prentiss Street... down by the river across by the railroad bridge. He was the manager of the store, and there you could fortunately get credit up to four or five dollars a week. If you didn't have money to pay, he'd let you pay on the weekend. And, the times were a little... certainly not like today. But, I don't want to go back to the old days. You would... at that time, it was in 1932 when the Depression was at its worst... we had lived through the Depression because we had moved back out in the country from French Island, and he had another farm. That was his second farm. So we survived the Depression quite well. He had rented the home on the Island and moved out to the farm, and we were sustainable there by doing for ourselves. At that time, he was working in the canoe shop, in the Old Town Canoe. After the Depression in the Roosevelt era when he was first elected, the WPA came on, and Mr. Seymour who was public works director in Old Town at the time. He became public works director but was a construction man who lived on the Island here again down behind the Island School, down by the ledges on Penobscot River. He was prominent in town as far as working, contracting and whatever. So, WPA came in... he became a supervisor for the WPA, and hired my father as a dynamite man. Of all things, my father had probably... I don't know where he ever got the idea that he was a dynamite man, but that's what he became was a dynamite man. So, his wages were a little bit better than \$12 a week at the time.

CN What would he do?

PL In those days the work era was mostly to make work and to try to improve, like they say today, the infrastructure. Today,



they talk about infrastructure as bridges, and sewerage, and in those days it was, "let's improve the city dump," which was in downtown Main Street and today became the city park. So, that's where we used to dump all our rubbish. And now it's become a city park. What my father did was they built the airport up in Old Town. They built the runways there for Mr. Dewitt, who was the only aviator in town. He built his own airplane. He built and airplane... he was Ken Dewitt. I think the Dewitt field is named for him. He built an airplane and had it in his garage. He was a mechanic and finally someone asked him how he was going to get it out of the garage, and where was he going to fly it. So, they built an airport up in Old Town... and my father was dynamite man. I can remember that later in life thinking, "My God, how did he ever do that!" So, we started about the stores on the Island. The T&K Store was where we shopped because my father could pay on weekends. And WPA paid every two weeks like the government labor jobs do. That was... the stores were quite a bit different. Everyone walked to the store, and everyone walked home with their groceries. No shopping like we do today. If you went to the store and spent more than a dollar, you were spending a lot of money... because for a dollar you could buy hamberger and a loaf of bread and a can of vegetables. So, it was quite a bit different. It was interesting.

CN What were your meals like?

PL Well, I can remember, that was an interesting thing. I can remember my mother on Mondays she used to plan to do the washing on Monday. So, we were going to have just sandwiches at noon because, we'd have to do that mostly ourselves. I'd like to go on a little bit about Monday the wash day. I can remember my mother taking out the work stands that my father built for her... those little stands that she used to put her tubs on. She'd put two tubs on... one by the washing machine was a hand-wringer washing machine. Had a big old copper kettle on the stove where she'd boil her water, and that was summer or winter, whether you needed heat or not... if you needed hot water. Because, we didn't have hot water. In fact, this reminds me of a lot of things. I think there was five bath tubs on French Island at one time, in my days, in the late 30s. The homes did not have bath tubs. It was very interesting that I can remember the first bath tub that I saw. I believe it was Peanut Dubay who ran the restaurant, the little cafe on top of the hill on French Island. I used to chum with... my friends were his family. It was a big family.

CN What was the restaurant called? PL It was. All we called it was "Peanut's", if I remember. It was "Peanut's" and "Pearly's". There was two of these type places. One was "Pearly's" and one was "Peanut's". They were both places where you know drinking of beer became of age in 1932. So that prospered the little cafes. And that's how they started. That was where the men used to come home from work and that was their first stop... the top of the hill at either

"Peanut's" or Pearly's". And, sometimes they got home... I can remember, my father didn't drink very much, because I guess it was probably because he made his own homebrew at home. But, there again it was the saving of money. But, a lot of the people would stop, that lived on the other side of French Island, and stop at "Pearly's" or "Peanut's" and gather there and talk about the day, and that was their activity for the... no TV, no radio... that was their entertainment for the day, sitting there and gabbing until 5:30/6 o'clock at night. If it was a good night they would stay even later. The days of playing softball. I can remember all the Island had softball teams. You talk about entertainment. The entertainment was... I can remember the people were the models for the kids who were 19, 20 and 25 and some married men playing softball on French Island. Good softball teams... they'd play every night like the... you don't see none of this today, it's little league. But, then it was the big league... because it was the men that played and entertained everyone else.

CN What other kinds of things did they do on the Island?

PL Well, we had... Peanut started his boxing matches, Peanut Dubay. And my brother was a very good featherweight boxer. CN Which brother was that? PL That was Henry. Henry Legasse, who was... fought some of the best boxers throughout New England, not just Maine. And, the entertainment... I say was, Peanut Dubay started these fights, and it would be every Friday evening at the old Island School baseball field. Because, he got to be able to put stadiums up and it benefited the softball team. So he put little bleachers up and people could sit, and they put a boxing ring up there. At the beginning it was mostly just young kids that were doing this. In fact, I was there. He'd give you 15, 20 cents, 25 cents to get in the boxing ring, and some of the good fighters started there. In fact, Bobby Howe... who I had fought at one time, and I think we were only 12 and 13 years old. He went on to become a pretty good boxer himself. But, my brother fought there, and then Peanut Dubay got to generate his own type of boxers like Rosaire Veilleux, Spike Richard, and now the interest really turned. And, the St. Louis... my goodness, a couple of the St. Louis' were really terrific boxers. In fact, Clement St. Louis and... they were boxers that... there was another one. Anyway, they were really good. They were tough and that's why people wanted to see them fight, and not just get up there and run and punch. They were really sluggers. That generated entertainment so much that the fight nights, my goodness, there was no place to put people. So, it was just all over. And the paying for these things was just a passing of the hat. People would put ten cents in, 15 cents. That's how he generated the income, and it turned to be a pretty big enterprise.

CN Was it mostly people from French Island?

PL At the end, there were people... because now they were drawing people from Bangor, you needed automobiles. The parking became a problem and... like I say, for the streets in French Island that were only eight foot wide, when I was a kid there was no need of wide streets there was no cars, now you had automobiles up there and it was quite strange. But, they would draw fight crowds from all over the area there, quite a few miles away.

CL Can you go back to that bathtub story?

PL I can remember the first time I saw a bathtub. In all honesty, that I can remember in my mind, was Peanut Dubay's. Because, now he had purchased a home across from the Island School that had land and a nice big home. I wish I could remember the man's name who died, and eventually that's how Peanut Dubay was able to buy that house.

TURNUED THE TAPE.

PL Dubay's who had just bought this big place and was across from the Island School. The plumbing... the first time I saw a bathtub was not the late 40s it was really the late 30s or middle 30s when they bought this home. And they took us in... they wanted to show us something. I wasn't the only one, but I was in the group. They wanted to show us something new that they had that no one else had. We were wondering what could be in the bathroom that we hadn't seen before. But sure enough there was this big tub. Someone asked what it was. It was a bathtub. So, we didn't actually take a bath in it. They didn't either. All they did was play in it. **TAPE WENT DEAD!!!** (Every once in awhile you can her voices in the background but very faint.)

NEAR THE END OF THE TAPE IT PICKS UP IN THE MIDDLE OF PL. The changes that I noticed were that there were a few more automobiles when I left than there were in my early years. Because, the country had prospered a little more through the years... the New Deal. And more people were becoming able to afford a \$500... and that was... \$500 was a brand new car in those days. I can remember that gas station that I worked at. I can remember this person driving in one day, and a brand new car... (space on tape) two weeks before... . (space on tape) walking for many years. But it saved money and was able to buy a \$550 brand new 1939 Chevrolet. (long space on tape) Credit was something that was unheard of. You would never go to the store and say I want to buy this \$300 item because that would have been... or \$500 item. (hitch on tape) automobile. That was what took place in the late 30s under the New Deal situation. You became a country that was... We became a country that was credit oriented. Now we were able to buy things and buy them and pay them periodically. This was quite a change... for French Island as well as the country. That's what I can remember. Because, I can remember my father

owning a home, but the lumber was bought from Mr. Hildreth, who owned the Hildreth Lumber yard and he had a \$500... \$600 mortgage on that house because of lumber that he built himself. When the New Deal came in, as I say what the changes were and what... the things that I saw under the credit orientated society... was, now my father was able to take that and refinance that home under the... I don't remember if that was when the FHA was formed or what... but now it was \$5 a month rather than having to pay Mr. Hildreth whatever he could at whatever interest it was. Now the government took this over and it was \$5 a month to pay of a mortgage of about \$550/\$600. And this is what I saw in society and how it changed. Now this became a thing for the people and I didn't see, like a say, a man that was walking and all of a sudden driving a new car. (tape skip) So, these were the changes that took place.

CN Like (tape skipping- word here and there) when was plumbing ... to the house?

PL In my home plumbing was not in our home until I believe my sister had it done... and that was after the war. CN How many (tape skipping)? PL I had 4 brothers and 4 sisters in the family. Two of them died in birth.

CN When did you leave French Island?

PL I left ... I believe it was 1941. (tape skipping- part of a word here and there) off the Bradley Road. (TAPE IS DEAD FOR AWHILE)

**MOST OF SECOND SIDE OF TAPE 1 WAS LOST. STARTING OF SIDE ONE TAPE 2**

PL Some of the laws that came in place because of the election of the new president. Prior to that some of the places that began selling beer when prohibition became legal were selling candy. I can remember Willie Michaud's, that became Pearly's restaurant, was mostly a candy place where the kids would buy candy. I don't know if Peanut's was even thought of as a little store at the time. I think it was a house that someone lived in. The changes that took place were because of prohibition. Prohibition came in in '32 when the election, and prior to that people used to have to buy their beer from people who made it illegal on the Island. And, I can remember the days when I'd be in the shed at home looking for a card in the window, because we used to have the people from the college... the college kids used to come in and drink beer on Sundays. We had one of the bootleggers, they called him, that lived right close to where we were. The signal was, when they wanted beer, and my father did make homebrew. When they wanted beer they would put a sign up in the window "1 beer... 1 bottle" and if they wanted 2 bottles, they'd put two signs



up. And I'd run across the yards and bring them the beer. CN Did he have a still? Did your father have a still? PL No. What he did was make home-brew. This was beer. They also sold, these bootleggers sold alcohol. Sometimes they'd buy it in five gallon cans, and it would be pure alcohol. Then they would sell it in little half-pint bottles, and they'd call it split. They used to, some people told me they'd mix it in a tub with water... half and half, alcohol and water. And you'd buy a bottle of split. I think it was 75 cents a bottle, for a little small bottle. I remember one Fourth of July buying on of those. I conned my brother and my sister out of their quarter, and went over and bought a bottle of that. She took a sip of it, and she wanted her quarter back. There was no way I was going to get that quarter back. So, I figured as long as I paid for it I better drink it. I thought I would die. I ended up sleeping in the barn that my father had the horse stabled in. And I crawled into where we put the hay for the horse to eat. They didn't find me for, I guess, a day or so. They didn't know where I was. But, it was quite an experience.

CN So this was all illegal?

PL Oh, absolutely illegal. In fact we had several bootleggers on the Island that as kids we used to watch where they would go put their liquor, and we'd go down there and get the cans and unbury the five gallon cans and dump it into the ground, just to be hateful I guess more than anything. Every once in awhile the government men would come in and make a raid on some of these bootleggers. I can remember as a kid watching these... they called them G-Men then. That was before the FBI, I believe. Government men were G-Men. They'd come in with their long sticks with nails on the end, poking in the ground hoping to break open, bust a can of alcohol. CN Because they buried the stuff underground? PL They used to bury the cans in the ground. That was their hiding place. We had one that used bury it several, 50-60 feet, down by the river bank. That was the one that we used to raid the most, because we were kids and we played on the river banks a lot. But some of the other bootleggers that were living right amongst neighbors, and nothing was ever said. That was a way of life.

CN Could we talk a little bit about some of the changes on the Island?

PL Well, along with that change came that new program of the new president. We saw where people who had been unemployed worked with the new WPA... the Workers Project Administration. And, also credit became very important. It came about where people now were able to buy homes and pay for homes. I know my father got a loan, and it was \$5 a month to pay for his rent through a government loan. So, this is where credit, from what I can see, took place, and that made quite a difference. I can remember what a difference it made for me. I was



shining shoes at the University of Maine, and I needed transportation, and I thought the best way to get... What I was doing, I was shining shoes downtown, and one of the college students got a shoeshine from me and said, "You could make a lot of money on weekends, if you came down on Friday nights, and shined shoes at the University of Maine." I thought, "Oh, my gosh. How am I going to get to the University of Maine." He said, "Do you have a bicycle? If you had a bicycle you could come down and shine shoes." I thought, "Well, I'll get myself a bicycle." That was interesting because... talk about credit. My brother worked for Joe Marquis, who was another person who lived on the Island, that had a little express. Franklin Taylor had one in town also. They were competing entities at the time... Taylor's Express and Marquis' Express. The only two ways of getting a package from Bangor to Old Town. I can remember my brother worked on that Express, and I was telling him about this bicycle. And he used to run in these different stores in Bangor picking up packages. One of those places was The Bangor Tire. He mentioned to me they sold bicycles, but I would need some money to pay the first payment, but he would talk to the person. We went down one day and, I had \$4.50, and I remember the bicycle was \$15 or \$16. And, they let me have it on credit. I paid out of my shoeshine money after I went down to the college. Every Friday night I'd go down to the college and ride my brother down on his bike... not my older brother, but my younger brother. That was another thing. I remember we got that bicycle that day and my brother rode me on the handle bars all the way from Bangor... pedaled me home on that bicycle. We were so enthused! I don't remember how long it took, but it was quite an experience. That bicycle did serve the purpose, because on Friday evenings, I'd go down to the college and shine shoes for the ROTC people, shine their belts. I had access to most all the fraternity houses... Kappa Sig, Sigma Nu, Sigma Ki, Phi Beta Kappa. They were all fraternity houses that I had access to, and I'd go in and they'd leave their shoes in their room. I'd shine their shoes. they'd leave my money there. I was really in business. My brother, I got him going down with me because I had too much to do. I assigned a couple of houses to him. So, my shining days in Old Town probably ended pretty much with that, because I was making some pretty good money.

CN Before that you said you were just downtown shining shoes?

PL Yes. We had, several of us younger kids, had a box, and we'd get down there and get on a corner and each corner was pretty well guarded, because some of them were the most traveled. Sometimes you had to exercise your authority to keep your corner. But it was quite an interesting thing. That was part of growing up and learning what the value of money was, really.

CN You talked a little bit about what credit did for you. What

do you think that might have precipitated in the credit for people on the Island? Why would that cause any change?

PL Well, I can remember, even before the War it was, things you would say were probably quite slow until World War II came about and extended employment to everyone who could work or be in the service. But, I can remember the credit part. As a youngster after I stopped shining shoes, I was still 13 or 14, I was working for a service... gas station in those days, not a service station but a gas station. I can remember one fellow worked across the street from that gas station that was on French Island, right at the railroad tracks. There was St. Germain's Gas Station. This person worked at Chapman's, so it was a machine shop. My mother later worked there during the War making pots for the war effort. I can remember him coming in with a brand new car, and I said, "Gosh!" It was amazing. How could he afford a new car? He had bought a new 1939 Chevrolet. And of all things the car cost \$550/\$600 at the most. I remember it was a brand new car, and I thought it was the nicest thing. I asked him how in the world could he buy a car like that. And he said, "Buy em on credit." I think that's the first time I heard the word credit and what it meant. And what a change it had done to the way people lived, and the change in people, from homes to car to furniture, from one thing to another. Now we became a country that we could buy on credit. That was the first that I can remember how the change came about on French Island and what it did for a lot of people.

CN We're going to get off that now, because I remember hearing stories before about Midnight Mass and Christmas and religion. Could you talk a little bit about... was your family religious?

PL Yes. My mother was always very religious. But never, hardly ever, had the opportunity to attend mass on Sundays. But, she was very religious and made certain that we had our prayers said every evening and that we would go to church on Sunday. She'd prepare us all for church even though she could not go herself in a lot of cases. As she grew older she was at church every day, after the kids left. But, I can remember the days of going to Sunday school at the French church, St. Joseph's Church. That was called the French church because supposedly that was where all the French people in Old Town went to church. But, we had a competing parish, was an Irish church they called it then. I can remember when the Herbert Gray episode of going to school there. One of the kids was telling me that he goes to catacism on Saturday afternoons... on Saturday mornings, I should say, because at the French church you went to church in the morning, and then you had to go back there in the afternoon from 1:00 to 3:00 o'clock for catacism. And I thought there must be a better way because Saturday afternoon I wanted to play, and my friend from the Herbert Gray I guess told me that there was another way. You

could go to the Irish church, and go to catacism after mass in the morning for half, three-quarters of an hour and be all done for the day. So, I can remember I made my confirmation at the Irish church. And from that time on I converted everyone at the household to go from the French church to the Irish church. And, I can remember going to Sunday masses at the Irish church, and there was this Irish priest there that had nothing but unkind words for French Island. That was a place of sin! Many Sundays I'd sit there and listen to that instead of my... my goodness, this can't be that bad. But just as a kid I didn't realize what he was really speaking about. I remember him. It was quite a sermon.

CN So, this was Sunday morning, you'd get up and go to mass and then afterwards you'd go to catacism. And your brothers and sisters probably were doing the same type of thing.

PL That's when we converted all to the Irish church because it was... another thing it was the first church on the way to mass in the morning. It was a little bit shorter. And, so we stopped there to go to church. That was the way we converted from the French to the Irish church. But, growing up in a Catholic home, midnight masses that we used to have, we'd always look forward to it because it was always party time of stew... a big rabbit stew and dumplings and everyone was in a joyous mood, and everyone looked forward to it. It was almost a party night, yet it was a religious event. Everyone enjoyed that time of the year, whether it was snow storms or bitter cold, it was still... You'd stop at people's homes and... after midnight mass... even as a child, I can remember stopping at other people's homes at midnight with my mother and father, just friends and... Of course, they had been previously invited, I imagine. But, everyone had a pot of stew.

CN So where did they get the rabbits? Did they hunt?

PL Oh, gosh. That was another thing. As a child, I can remember my brother, Henry, who was a boxer, we'd go out and hunt rabbits. A lot of people trapped rabbits, which was illegal. But, my brother, he would save 20 cents and buy a box of 22s, and he had a 22, a gun... it wasn't automatic but it was a 22 gun. I didn't have one. I was just a child. We'd go to Pea Cove. He had a spot there where he'd... I was the dog. He'd say you circle this area around here, and I'd go around the area and (sounds of barking beagle) and he said, if I whistle you stop barking. Everyonce in awhile I'd hear a whistle, and I'd stop barking and then I'd hear a shot and he'd have shot a rabbit. I can remember he shot a rabbit it wasn't 15 feet in front of me. I had scared that rabbit on to him, and when he whistled... I looked up and there he was and there was the rabbit between him and I, and he shot the rabbit. Yeah. We used to catch several rabbits a day. Bring them in and sell them for 25 cents.

CN Sell them door to door?

PL We had people who wanted them. Yeah. It was a... talk about door to door, we had a peddler that used to come in on Saturday mornings... We called him One Eye. He had a horse and wagon. He baskets and chickens hanging from the side of that wagon. It was our way of getting our Sunday dinner. He peddled on that Island for I don't know how long. CN Do you remember his name? PL No. We called him One Eye, because he had a bad eye that was really scary for us kids to look at. Today... I think back at that and it was really... He had an old horse that could hardly walk and that wagon, I don't know, it was ready to fall apart. But, like I say, there were baskets and things hanging from it. But mostly it was chickens. But they were live chickens. Certain streets that he would know where his customers were. I know my mother bought a chicken practically every week... a regular. It was alive! We had to kill the chicken, and bathe it in hot water, and pull the feathers out and that was our Sunday dinner. Yeah, that was quite a change, from the wagon to the supermarket.

CN Wow. Can you tell me a little bit about your high school years?

PL My high school years were short because I really did not finish school as a formal education. I went out to work in the ship yard before the war started. I tried to join a service just as the war started and I couldn't. I remember they did induct three other... well they inducted one other person, this Arthur Dubay who was a friend. There was four of us who had gone down there in December right after Pearl Harbor to enlist in the army. And, being so small, and being only 17 years old the army would not take me. And, my two friends, Clarence Daigle and Norman Comeau and Arthur Dubay, the recruiter said, "Well, you can go around and join the army... around the corner." Arthur Dubay did and they sent him to India and the next time I saw my friend, he was bald headed. But, it was several months later, right after that I went to work in the ship yards... going away from formal schooling... And, all those friends of mine who had been in school with me at the Herbert Gray, stayed in school and graduated from Old Town High School in 1942/43. And, I went on into the service. Came out of the service in '45, and I went to work with my brother who was by that time produce manager for the A&P Stores. Because he had been married and had asthma and was not inducted into the service.

CN A&P Stores in Old Town?

PL He worked in the A&P Store in Bangor. Then went to Augusta and up to Aroostook County, Presque Isle, Houlton. He opened several new stores. He was pretty good as produce man, and they took him and moved him around quite a bit. CN This