

**EI-717**

**ALEXANDRINA CUNHA**

**BIRTHDATE: DECEMBER 14, 1910**

**INTERVIEW DATE: NOVEMBER 9, 1995**

**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 84**

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**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.**

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**PORTUGAL, 1920 AND 1935**

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**RESIDENCES:**

- **PORTUGAL: PRAIA**
- **THE US: FALL RIVER AND TAUNTON, MASSACHUSETTS**

LEVINE: Okay, today is November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1995, and I'm here in Taunton, Massachusetts with Mrs. Alexandrina Cunha, who came with her entire family from Portugal when she was nine years of age. At that time, the family came through Boston. Mrs. Cunha stayed here then for three years, and went back to Portugal with her family. Then, when she was twenty-four years of age, in 1935, she came to this country through Ellis Island by herself, right?

CUNHA: Right.

LEVINE: Well, I'm really looking forward to everything you can remember. Let's start. If you'd say your birth date, and where in Portugal you were born.

CUNHA: I was born in Praia.

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

CUNHA: P-R-A-I-A, the Azores, of course. Santa Maria, Azores.

LEVINE: Okay, and what date were you born?

CUNHA: The fourteenth of December, 1910.

LEVINE: Now, did you live in Praia up until you—

CUNHA: Until I came back, yes, yes.

LEVINE: Now, when you—you were nine. Up until that time, do you remember much about life in Praia?

CUNHA: Yes. I used to like America very much when I was small, of course. And I went back, and no schoolin'. People didn't go to school there, and we had to go—there's no runnin' water, no bathrooms in the house. We used to go to the well and fetch the water, and carry the jars on our head. And---

LEVINE: Did you do that, when you were that small, before?

CUNHA: Stopped ever'body, sure! Everybody, because there was no—there was no places where women could work. There was -- everybody used to do farmin' for themselves, raise corn, wheat, beans, wherever they could raise on their lands. Just like, I had a tough time and my sister, this one, the one—not that one, the other one. Because we went—she's older than me two years, right? So, my father took the three—and we went,--- three boys, three brothers. My father was a fisherman, so he took the three boys fishin', and my sister and I and my mother, we used to take care of the house, take care of the cows, take care of the fields. We used to go plantin', hoe corn, and then we used to carry the wood to bake the bread. Everybody used to bake their own breads.

LEVINE: In your home?

CUNHA: No, each one has, had – each house has an oven through the wall, a brick oven. And each one used to raise their stuff to eat, potatoes, and—in fact, we, my sister and I, we used to take care the -- even the cows!

LEVINE: Did you milk the cows?

CUNHA: Yes, we milked the cows, and we used to —at night, the cows -- that time, the cows used to sleep in corrals. They wouldn't sleep in the fields; it was in corrals. At night we had to go over there, and far from home. The farm was

not near home. And ---- and we used to go feed them again, water them. It was a tough life. I never liked that life.

LEVINE: And your father, now, he was a fisherman. Did he go out for long periods of time?

CUNHA: No. They'd go, the fisherman there, even today, they go end of ---- sometimes midnight, and come back late. If they caught a lot of fish, they'd come in early, it depend. And still—

VOICE: [whispers] Excuse me--

LEVINE: Excuse me, we're going to just pause. [Tape off/on] See now, and you were talking about your brothers, and your father, and the fishing.

CUNHA: Yeah, so my father used to go, bought a boat, -- went from here, bought a boat there, and took my three brothers, younger than me, fishin'. And when he'd come, our house is next to the ocean—big beach, beautiful beach! And when he'd come across close to the house, he used to holler for me and my sister to go help them carry the fish.

LEVINE: You remember what kind of fish they were, that they car---?

CUNHA: Well, they had mackerel, tuna, bonitos, and—almost like here!

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

CUNHA: Joe DeBraga. [PH]

LEVINE: D-E--?

CUNHA: Then Braga, yes.

LEVINE: And your mother's name?

CUNHA: Luisa Madeleine, Madelaine

LEVINE: Is that M-A-D-E-L-A-I-N-E?

CUNHA: Yeah.

LEVINE: And your brothers and sisters, what were theirs?

CUNHA: My sister that went with me was Philomena, and my, -- one of my, the older brother was John, Louie, and Jessie.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, okay. And did you have grandparents living near you?

CUNHA: Yes, I had my grandfather, my father's father was a hundred and ---hundred and two, I think. And then my father's step-mother—we used to call her grandmother, too. They died—he died, I think, two years after we went from here over there. And then she lived—she was still, when I came, my grandmother was still living when I came the second time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What do you remember about your grandfather?

CUNHA: He was a fisherman, too, very nice man, very, very nice old man. And when we came over here to this country in 1920, he was—because we came ---- twelve. My father brought twelve children with him. And of course, we were poor. He borrow the money for us to come, and he was sitting on the wall. I remember, I can see him crying. And he said to my father, "Joe, where are you going with all these children?"

LEVINE: Now, who were the twelve children, because there were only you and your sister, three brothers--?

CUNHA: No, that's the one—that's when we came the first time, that he was living.

LEVINE: I see, and then there were twelve? I'm confused about the twelve children.

CUNHA: See, there was some of—when we came the first time, there was my sis ----, older sister, and three brothers here already. They came by themselves, too. My uncle called them to come over here. And then when we went back, my father only took two girls and three boys, the younger ones, the ones that couldn't work here, that weren't old enough to work, so we had to go with them.

LEVINE: I see. So when you and your family were in the United States, then did your mother and father have more children?

CUNHA: No, they all were born there.

LEVINE: So—

CUNHA And we were fourteen: seven boys and seven girls, and I'm the seventh girl.

LEVINE: I see, so the children, after the initial five children, they were born when the family went back to Portugal?

CUNHA: No.

LEVINE: I'm confused.

CUNHA: They all were born in Portugal. When my younger brother came over here, he was two years old. So when we went back, he was three—he was five, rather. Two years over here—he was two. And when we got there, my father even took him to go fishin', in the boat, so he could have a share on the fish, so he could sell. And everybody used to raise their own hogs. Meat—there was no markets. There was no stores to sell anything but fabric, cloth to make dresses or pants. You had to buy that, and after, you have to go to a dressmaker or tailor to have it made.

LEVINE: How about shoes? What did you have for shoes?

CUNHA: We had [laughs]—we go barefoot all the time. Just on Sundays, we used to go to church, and everybody then used to wear shoes. And to the shoes, to last, because the church was far from home, and we used to take our shoes in our hands, and put the shoes on near the church. That was how the things were. Today, they all, with shoes on like over here. There was no markets. No, everybody used to raise their own hogs to kill. At Christmastime, they, some of them, used to kill for --meat for Christmas. They used to kill a goat or sheep, and that was—the one that had it. And the one that didn't have it, go buy.

LEVINE: Now, were you religious? Was your family religious?

CUNHA: Yes, we always went to church, yeah.

LEVINE: Which church?

CUNHA: [Portuguese]

LEVINE: [Laughs] Was it a Catholic Church?

CUNHA: Yes, oh yeah. Well, there's no—that time there, there was no other religion but Catholics. It was just Catholics. Now they have, I think, two. They have the Protestants, and the Baptists. But they didn't have that. It was just all Catholics.

LEVINE: Can you remember Christmas, how you celebrated it? Was it different from here?

CUNHA: Oh, yes!

LEVINE: How was it, then?

CUNHA: Well, Christmas over there, the only thing they had that we remember good was going to church at midnight mass. And then, everybody, like I say,

they'd kill a sheep or a goat to have meat for a dinner. But no gifts, no, nothing else. They used to all tell about how Jesus was born, and the story of Jesus, and that was Christmas.

LEVINE: What was Easter like?

CUNHA: Easter, they—my mother used to, my mother and all—it was tradition. They used to bake sweet bread. And then they used to put eggs, when they bake, on the dough. Each of the family had an egg, a piece of that sweet bread, and an egg. That was Easter.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And did you have any other celebrations over there that we don't have here?

CUNHA: Well, there's a lot of fiestas. That's all what they had over there. There was no theater, no dancing hall, no telephones, no electric.

LEVINE: What would go on at a fiesta?

CUNHA: Well, it was like church. It was a church-goin'. And then in the summer time, May, they had—they still have it, it's a tradition—they have the Holy Ghost. And then they go to church, have a mass, and then they have, they have women bake sweet bread. And then that time, they kill cows. And then you go—each church has their own groups, and then we used to go over there, and we used to, they used to cook that meat, and make soup out of it with the meat, sweet bread. Once a year. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Do you remember, like, births, or weddings, or funerals, how they handled that kind of thing?

CUNHA: Well, birthdays, nobody knew about a birthday. There was no parties for birthdays. Maybe some mothers, they had small children, they'd cook some eggs, give each one an egg for a birthday. You didn't know when your birthday was, or anything. Weddings, they used to make pretty good weddings, the ones that could afford, of course. And invited the---just the families, the closest families, to go to church, and they had a ---then a dinner, but not even cow's meat. They used to kill, like I say, goats or sheep!

LEVINE: How about funerals? Did you ever witness a funeral there?

CUNHA: Well, the funerals are very poor. Even—well, today, no. Today, they're good, but like the people that died is laid on the house. They didn't have no funeral parlor, nothin'. And they just dressed them, and they—while they're buried in twenty-four hours. And they had a man that make the coffins with boards. Four boards, I used to call it, four boards, and covered with black cloth. That was it. And they used to be carried on four men's shoulders.

LEVINE: How about foods? Do you remember any other foods that your mother made, or maybe your grandmother, that you had over there?

CUNHA: Well, food we had, like I say, in my house, we had plenty of food, poor food, of course, with potatoes, fish, plenty of fish. We used to kill two hogs a year, two pigs a year, to have a li-- and there was no electric, no refrig. You know how they preserved the meats? Salt it!

LEVINE: Do you remember seeing that? Do you remember how they did it?

CUNHA: We did it! I used to help my mother doing it!

LEVINE: Oh, well tell me how it was done.

CUNHA: See, they killed the pigs—

LEVINE: Here's some.

CUNHA: There it is. See, this was already in 1951 when I went there. But they killed the pigs, and then they get the family. That's when they have a party, when you kill your pig o---, around December, the month of December. They get the family together, and my mother used to make biscuits, sweet bread, plenty of wine. And then the neighbors, you invite the neigh—they hang the pig on the corner of the kitchen, after it's killed of course, and it's all done, cleaned. And they --- the neighbors, you invite the neighbors to come and see the pig, and they measure with their hands which one in the neighborhood killed the fattest pig.

LEVINE: And then what?

CUNHA: And then those people that came in, they had a glass of wine, and some biscuits, or sweet bread, whatever.

LEVINE: What did people do for fun?

CUNHA: Well, at that time, it was more friendly people than it is today, because there was no radio, no TV. We used to have for fun, like, today was Saturday. We used to have wool, and we prepare ---- we spin the wool. I still have one thing upstairs, you know, like this, spin it? And we get some neighbors, come to my house this Saturday, and we cook some corn—not on the cob, but you know, corn already. And then they had wine; was plenty of wine on the island! Everybody, I think, everybody had wine. And then the boys and girls, younger, they'd take the guitars, and they'll empty a bedroom or something, and we'd dance there, the Portuguese dances, over there! That was the only fun we could have. Like my sister, she used to play the guitar,

and my younger brother. And we had a pretty good, big house. And my father's bedroom was downstairs, and we had a big room upstairs. And we used to go upstairs on Sundays when my father didn't go to --fishing, and we used to get the neighborhood kids and go upstairs and dance and sing, and play cards.

LEVINE: Do you remember any Portuguese songs?

CUNHA: I never was much of a singer [laughs].

LEVINE: Oh, because I was going to ask you if you could sing some.

CUNHA: No!

LEVINE: Okay, well now how was it decided that your family would come here when you were nine years old?

CUNHA: My uncle, my bro---my father's brother, was here. And there was the war of 1914. and he had two sons go into the war, and he promised to ----if the boys, his sons, my cousins, would go---they went to war, and if they'd come back healthy and, of course, ---- he'd go to the Santa Maria Azores and make that Holy Ghost feast with cows and---so they did. They came back healthy and all that, so he went and make that feast over there. And my sis--- my older sisters and brothers, they begged my uncle to come, to bring them. So of course, he couldn't. And they had to know how to read. So none of them knew how to read or write. My father did. So my uncle says, "Well, you go with them, and after they're there, we take care." So my oldest brother, he was in the service, because over there when they're twenty, they're forced to---they have to go. So he was in Saint Michael, in the service. My father went there and told him, and he says, "No." He says, "If you go, I don't care if you go. If you go, you take my mother and my youngest brothers and sisters, and I'll stay." Because he had to stay, because he couldn't come. He says, "I'm a man. I can stay alone better than my mother can stay with, just with the small children." So then my father went and borrowed the money, and that's how we came.

LEVINE: Now you say your uncle did that festival for his sons?

CUNHA: Yeah.

LEVINE: So in other words, how would that work? Somebody would have an occasion, and they would provide everything for the festival?

CUNHA: Yeah, yeah. If, like my uncle, he'd provide everything, because he had a promise, like, to that church. The Ghost---they have a mass, and after the mass they have men cookin' ---they have a week women baking bread and a

lot of stuff, and then on the Thursday they kill some cows, and they cook it. And all the people, all the people goes over there and eat for free.

LEVINE: And then this brings a blessing?

CUNHA: Yes.

LEVINE: On his sons? Is that what that was?

CUNHA: Yes. That's the faith they had.

LEVINE: Yeah. So when—do you remember the trip over the first time?

CUNHA: Over here?

LEVINE: Mm-hm.

CUNHA: Yes! We came through Boston, and I think it was a man. A man died on the ship. Used to take us nine days to get over here.

LEVINE: Now this would have been 1919, right after the First World War was over ---

CUNHA: Yeah.

LEVINE: right?

CUNHA: All right.

LEVINE: Because you were nine years old?

CUNHA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Or 1918 it could have been.

CUNHA: No, it was 1920.

LEVINE: 1920, oh, because your birthday is in December,

CUNHA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Right, okay, 1920.

CUNHA: So a man died aboard the ship. I don't know then what hap—you know. I remember they covered him and threw him overboard, the man overboard.

LEVINE: You saw that--?

CUNHA: Yeah, because that takes nine days ---- used to take nine days. And so the -  
---we had to go, what do you call it?

LEVINE: Steerage?

CUNHA: We had to go to an island in Boston, to get sterilized. And we stayed there  
twenty-one days.

LEVINE: Really? Do you remember anything about that, those twenty-one days?

CUNHA: Well, my mother took sick. My mother, I, my sister, and my brother Joe, and  
my sister Rose—we all went to the hospital. We all got sick on the boat, and  
we went to the hospital. So my other sisters and my father, and my other  
brothers, they had to be on the island, on an island there.

LEVINE: You're sure it wasn't Ellis Island? Because there's another island that people  
go to when they have—

CUNHA: In Boston?

LEVINE: No.

CUNHA: No, we came through Boston. It was in Boston.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, do you know what sickness the family had?

CUNHA: Well, we just were seasick, I guess.

LEVINE: Mm-hm, but you stayed twenty-one days?

CUNHA: But we stayed twenty-one days, yeah. And then my brothers, my older  
brothers, three brothers, were here already. And they went over there; they  
used to go to Boston. They brought us—I came over here the first time  
barefoot. Was my younger three brothers, my three sisters. We came  
barefoot! Then when we got to Boston and to that island, my brothers  
bought some shoes, and they took shoes to us. And we came to Fall River  
then. We lived in Fall River the three years.

LEVINE: What do you remember about the time here in the United States when you  
were here the first time?

CUNHA: Oh, was beautiful! Beautiful. There was no radios yet, and no TV, but there  
was that—[not understood] phones, they call it.

LEVINE: Oh, the victrola.

CUNHA: The victrola, yes. My father bought one. And then we—the ones that was age enough to go to school, we went to school.

LEVINE: What was school like in Fall River for you?

CUNHA: Good. It was a nice school, and—

LEVINE: Were you able to learn English?

CUNHA: Yes I did. I was in the fourth—my sister got to the fifth grade, and I got to the fourth grade, in three years. I started with not knowing a word, or understanding a word. And in three years, I could write, because that's what I wanted. And when my father went back, I didn't want to go. I wanted to stay with my older brother. But my father says, "No, you're not old enough to work. You're brother ain't going to be,"—because he was married already, my brother. He says, "He ain't going to be tied up with you." So, but I never liked it over there, never.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember what helped you in learning the language?

CUNHA: Well, because I didn't want to be a greenhorn. They used to call the people that came from the old country greenhorns! I'll never forget that!

LEVINE: What did that mean, exactly? Do you know what it meant, when they called you greenhorn?

CUNHA: I don't know! I don't know, but they used to call that. And so we didn't want to be called that, and we had to learn. We learn, we come home, talk to my sisters. Here and there, we understand one word. The next we didn't, and we learned.

LEVINE: What was your mother and father's attitude? Did they want to become Americanized? Or they didn't want to?

CUNHA: No, my mother didn't want to go back, for nothing in the world. And she had a lot of work! She had fourteen children ---- to bake here. And of course, we used to buy the bread from the bakery. And of course, she used to cook, and all that. There was no washing machines; she used to wash by hand. And then, when my oldest brother, the one that stayed behind, that was in the service, he came a year after us. And when he got here, my father was working. He didn't want my father to work. He wanted my father to help my mother. And then my father didn't work. But, my father never liked it over here, because he wanted to go fishin'. Even my-- when he wanted to go, my brothers, my oldest brothers, they promised him. Even they wanted to go to a lawyer, make a paper. So my oldest brother get married when the next

younger kid started to work. And then the next, and then, when everybody was working. And he didn't want it; he wanted to go back. My mother didn't want to go, and it was hard. It was very hard, because my mother loved this count—she had a lot of work, but she loved this country. And then she left. Out of fourteen, she took five ---back, because we were small. And all the rest, they stayed here.

END OF SIDE A      BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: What did your father do for work here? Before you ---

CUNHA: He worked on the Fall River mills, where they used to make—they'd weave cloth.

LEVINE: Now, were there a lot of Portuguese people in Fall River?

CUNHA: There still is [laughs]. Fall River, you call it Saint Michael. All people from there, yeah. Yeah, even when I came by myself, I came to live with my sister, it was—we came to Fall River. I came in a boat from New York, to Fall River, in a boat. There was a ferry boat running, so I came. And I lived two years there. Then I met my husband. I got married, came to Taunton [laughs].

LEVINE: Okay, well, what was it like for you first? Before we go on to your meeting your husband and everything, what was it that went you went back to Portugal, what was it like for you, having been here for three years, and then to go back?

CUNHA: Well, to tell you the truth, the honest God truth, it was hell! I didn't like it over there. I didn't like it! I didn't like the way they'd—of course, we got there, no shoes on. Work on the fields. Carry wood to burn to bake bread, to make food, to cook the food and everything. Go to the water, to the wells. Carry water. Take care of the cows. Go work on the fields. That was—to me, it was hell! I didn't like it.

LEVINE: How did your brothers and sisters feel, the ones who had been here and went back?

CUNHA: None of them liked it! In the end, they all came back.

LEVINE: So really, it was just your father who really liked it?

CUNHA: Yeah, it was my father. And like, they --- my bro--- they stayed there. I came to this country, and then I was here two years, like I said. I got married, a man from Santa Maria, too. [laughs]

LEVINE: How did you know him?

CUNHA: I didn't.

LEVINE: When you married him you didn't?

CUNHA: Well, when I, I --- I met him here, not there. I didn't know—no family, was from the other side of the island. I didn't know them. But, and then, they begged us to come, to come. They wanted to come, they wanted to come. My father was still living. And then, then my father died. My o— brother John, that was next to me, he wanted to come. So, that time, you had to bail them to come over here. You had to make papers. Those papers had to go to Washington, and then if in Washington they approved them to give it the visa to come. So my husband and I called—the first one was my brother. And we had bought a house already. And of course, we didn't have money, but we had the house. Then finally he came. And I wrote to Washington,---- even this agent in Fall River. He said, "Oh, you can never push your brother over here." I says "Well, let's try." "So you're goin' to write to Washington, tellin' them the story." I did. I couldn't write that, you know, but this agent wrote for me, telling them that the whole family here, the whole story! And we never liked it over there. So, they approved in Washington for my brother John to come. And then the others wanted to come, but my mother was still living.

LEVINE: Didn't your mother want to come, too?

CUNHA: Well, she was old already, and she had cancer. So then I used to write to my brothers. I used to say, "Now you can't." And my sister, the one over there—that one got married. This one on this side.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

CUNHA: And I used to say, "No, while my mother is living, I won't do anymore."

LEVINE: Help them to come over?

CUNHA: No, I says, "Somebody has to take care o' her." So—

LEVINE: Well tell me—just to back up for a minute—when you went back to Portugal, and you were there, you went back and you must have been there from 1923 to 1935?

CUNHA: Yes.

LEVINE: You were there for a long time when you went back?

CUNHA: Yes!

LEVINE: Then—

CUNHA: Well, I could never come, because before, one thing: My father didn't want me to come in the first place, because of course, I was the horse around the house, and workin'. And so I wrote to my sister. My oldest sister was here, and I wrote to her. And this was right after the Depression. The ports were closed; nobody could come in to the United States. And so my sister over here tried hard, and then she had a farm. My brother-in-law was a boss on the mills, one of the mills in Fall River, cotton mills. And finally, I was the second passport signed after the—they opened the immigration for people to come over. And so, then, to bring my—after my mother died, I called my two brothers and my sister, the one with ---in black there. And so, everybody, even the agent says, "Try and get it." But I wrote! I wrote to Washington. At that time, it wasn't the agent that wrote; it was—I wrote it, and I had this—because I couldn't write very good. And I asked my fr—a friend of mine, that went to high school, to write the way—I says, "You just write what I tell you." She wrote to Washington. And then I went to all my brothers. And then Washington sent me a form to filled out. I went to all my brothers and sisters for all them to sign, to get the family together. We did. They all came over, so—

LEVINE: You must have felt good about that.

CUNHA: Yeah. So only my father and mother died there, and all the family died here.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Well now, you mentioned earlier that you feel like you're an American, but your heart is in Portugal. What do you mean by that?

CUNHA: Well, today, the things are different, see. I went there 19—the first time I went there after the second time, it was already different. And it's peaceful over there. Seven years ago ---- when my mother died, we had the house. And of course, it was everybody's house. So I wanted to build a house. My sister was living there, the one that got married there. And [pause] nobody wanted to sell! So there was a mixed-up on that house. So I went there with my husband a couple of times, and it's so peaceful there! You don't hear no killin', no robberin'[sic.], nothin', even today! Even today! Because at, after my husband—my husband died there! We went vacation there, and he had a heart attack, and he died there. His mother was there, and father, and yeah.

LEVINE: What was your husband's name?

CUNHA: Cunha, Manuel Cunha.

LEVINE: Manuel, uh-huh.

CUNHA: Yeah, he came too to this country. He was thirteen years old.

LEVINE: What did he do in this country?

CUNHA: Silver polishing. He lived right down the ro-- he lived! He worked right down the road here for fifty years, all the time on Reed and Barton, it's the name of the company. They still operated here. Yeah, I worked there nine years, too.

LEVINE: Well, how many children did you have?

CUNHA: Just the one.

LEVINE: And that's Dorothy?

CUNHA: Yeah.

LEVINE: And Dorothy's last name?

CUNHA: Sousa.

LEVINE: Sousa, uh-huh. And do you have grandchildren?

CUNHA: I have four grand boys, grandsons, and one granddaughter, and I have seven great grandsons and daughters [laughs].

LEVINE: Well, that's nice. Now, let's see. What do you feel proud of, that you've done in your life? What makes you feel proud?

CUNHA: Well, I feel proud that I came to this country, a different life. You worked, but you earned the money, you got the money. Over there, you work for nothing, you know! You work on the fields. All what I had—I was twenty-four years old—all what I had was a couple of dresses to dress. And my father used to feed us, feed us. We worked in the fields, so might as well say—

LEVINE: You fed yourself.

CUNHA: Right, but no money!

LEVINE: Yeah, mm-hm. We skipped the part about the voyage on the Martha Washington. Do you remember that? That was when you came back again in 1935.

CUNHA: Yeah, I remember very well. I was—when I got—we couldn't come from Santa Maria. We had to go to San Miguel, that's Saint Michael. So I was there three months, in San Miguel, because there was no people coming. Like I say, the immigration was closed, and I was waiting, and American Consul made me wait. And so, finally, I—

LEVINE: Excuse me, why was it that you were coming alone that time? Why didn't anybody else come with you?

CUNHA: Because they—like I say, they had to be billed [sic.] out. And they wouldn't let people coming in. See, there was another girl from New Bedford, that was the first passport that they signed, for her to come after they opened immigration, and mine was the second. They wouldn't let nobody coming in, because this was right after the Depression. Even I still got a little bit of Depression here, 'cause I was here six months without working!

LEVINE: Oh, so okay—

CUNHA: But my sister had a farm. I knew how to work on a farm! She fed me, and I sleep there for—

LEVINE: In Fall River?

CUNHA: Yes.

LEVINE: So okay, so you got your passport signed, and you went and you waited

CUNHA: Yeah.

LEVINE: for the ship to come?

CUNHA: Yeah, to come. Then I—very nice ship, very clean. They had movies, nice food, but I got so seasick! And they don't let you stay down on your bed on the day time. So there used to be two sailors every day, get me up the deck, and be up in the deck.

LEVINE: Well now, were you in steerage? Would you say that's where, you know, that you were, in the bottom of the ship, like in a dormitory-type thing? Or were you in a cabin?

CUNHA: In a cab—everybody had cabinets [sic.]. Like, there was four beds, like bunk beds, and there was four girls on there, because it was—this is from Santa

Maria. But a lot of people came from the other islands, 'cause there's a lot of islands. And this, I met—the first day, yeah, it was the first night, I slept with those four girls. They had gone from here over there vacationing, you know, visiting. And then I met this couple from New Bedford, and they were just like if they were—they were. I considered them my father and mother. They were older couple. Old—they weren't old, but they had gone from New Bedford over there to visit their family, to Saint Michael, and I met them on the boat. And she told me, she says, "You don't like to be with those girls?" I says, "No, but I have to. It's my room." She says, "You mind? I have a girl in my room. You mind if my husband talks to the Captain, and transfer the other girl with the other girls, and you in my room?" Oh, I was glad! I says, "Sure!" They did! And she took care of me, because I was so seasick. She was a mother to me, until we get to New York. She gave me her address, and I felt so bad, I could never see — I never saw her again. And I went—I came to my, like I say, to my sister's, my older sister. I worked in the farm; I wasn't working.

LEVINE: Well, when the ship—do you remember when the ship, when the Martha Washington came in to the New York harbor?

CUNHA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you see the Statue of Liberty?

CUNHA: Yes, we went right through! Right through. We got there at night, and then when we got to get ready to come out with the passports, that's when I said I was Lillian. And, even, 'cause ----

LEVINE: Why don't you tell the story of that, how you happened to come to be called Lillian?

CUNHA: Well, when I came the first time over here, the very first time, my brother went with me to school. And I guess he couldn't pronounce my name in English, and he thought about Lillian, and he said it was Lillian. So I thought that was my English name. And it was—and when I used to wri ---, after I went to Portugal, I used to write to my brothers, my sisters, always Lillian.

LEVINE: So when you came to Ellis Island--?

CUNHA: So when I came to Ellis Island, when they look at the passport, first he said he was going to have somebody bilingual to talk for me. And I says, "No, I can talk! I can talk!" You know, broken English, but I always was open. And then he asked me, he says, "What's your name?" I says, "Lillian Braga." And he asked me a couple of times, "What's your name?" "Lillian Braga." And he looked at the passport, and looked at me. Of course, I had my picture; he knew it was me, but the name was wrong. So he says, "Can you

write your name in Portuguese?" I says, "Sure!" That was—and so he gave me the pen; I wrote it. And he told me, he says, "You know," and I told him the story, how it started. And he says, "From now on,"—I never forgot that. He says, "From now on, your name is Alexandrina." He says, "Never call yourself Lillian no more!" But when I came back, all the people in Fall River, the people that we used to know when I was a kid, they used to call me Lillian, because that's all they knew! And that's why a lot of people, even when they go for citizen papers, they get in trouble, is on account of the names.

LEVINE: Yeah. Now, was there anything else about Ellis Island that you remember besides that problem?

CUNHA: Well, they asked me—they asked me, that man that was taking care of the passports, how I was going to get to Fall River. And I says, "On the boat." He says, "But how do you know how to get home?" I says, "I know it," and I did; I had an idea how to get to my sister's house. And I says, "But I'm sure that my sister and my brother-in-law will be waiting for me." And they brought me on a taxi from there, where I took the boat to go to Fall River. And it was all night, and then in the morning we got in Fall River in the morning, sure enough, my sister and brother-in-law was there waiting for me!

LEVINE: Well, they must have known you were coming.

CUNHA: They were the ones that sent for me. They were the ones that they—were responsible for me, not to be, not to go on the welfare, or things like that. They had to support me if I didn't work, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, mm-hm. So then you worked on the farm for about six months?

CUNHA: Then I worked on the farm for my sister about six months, doing market, milking cows. They had cows. But—

LEVINE: What do you mean by doing market? What did you do?

CUNHA: Well, my brother-in-law had a horse and a buggy, and he was a boss down the mills, like I said. And he—my sister, and my niece, my nephew—she had men working for her. We used to go and pick the stuff, corn, potatoes, cabbage, string beans, radish, all kinds of vegetables she used to raise on the farm. And we used to pack that in crates, and get it ready. Some of them had to be washed—get them ready in crates. And then when my brother-in-law would come from the mill, he used to go with my nephew to the market. They had a market in the streets or something, to sell those, that stuff, those markets.

LEVINE: How was it different working on the farm here, compared with working on the farm in Portugal?

CUNHA: Well, working on the farm here wasn't bad, because see, my sister had four men working for her. [Cough] And I used to help. It wasn't to say I had to work. Because she was supporting me, she dressed me when I came, and all that. And she—I wasn't paying no board for six months. And then, then I went work, do housework, take care two small children.

LEVINE: How was that?

CUNHA: Well, it was all right. Getting' a dollar a week, taking care of two kids, and wash dishes for a couple of Jewish people. And wash the kitchen floor. But I was happy already, getting it. That time, a dollar was pretty good already. So she had another girl workin' for her, doin' the cooking and all that. Her husband, the people that I worked for, had a shop, sewing shop, making men's clothes. And so they had a house on the Cape, but they only need, in the summer time, one girl. So she asked me, if they give me a job— they would, --- her husband would give me a job down the mill, to work for him, down the shop, to work for him. And then in the winter time, go back to take care of the children. So I says, "Okay." I agreed. I went there; I learned sewing [laughs] --- {I have a [not understood] } --. After I learned sewing, I learned. They teach me how to sew, you know, 'cause electric machines and all that. And so before they came from down the Cape, I quit sewing. I got a job in another place, and I worked there. Then I was getting' three dollars a week.

LEVINE: And you liked it better?

CUNHA: Of course! Better than take care of kids! And then I worked there. When I got married, I was already getting five dollars a week sewing. And we got married. I met my husband. And then I had to start, keep goin'. I was eight years married without no chil—without Dorothy, and so I worked all the time. Then, when I---- when I moved to Taunton, he got me a job in Reed and Barton, silversmith. I worked there. Then—I start there, fifty cents an hour. And then I went to piece work, polishing silver. I was getting' forty dollars, fifty dollars a week. We used to work piece work, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, do you feel like you have some qualities that you would consider Portuguese, and some qualities that you would consider American? Do you feel like some of your ways are ways of--?

CUNHA: Well, yes. America, we -- mostly all the people, they all wanted to come over here, because this is a rich country. And the way they lived there was very poor. And it's a big change; it's a big, like I say my heart is there, but I don't

want to live. Now, I'm old anyways, but I wouldn't want to live there. Seven years ago I built a house there.

LEVINE: Really?

CUNHA: Yeah. My daughter's got a lot of pictures over on the other side.

LEVINE: Why did you do that?

CUNHA: Because I used to go there, vacationing. I used to like—my husband's family was living, and we used to go there, vaca -- you know, for vacations. And I used to like it, because it was so peace—the people there are very friendly. That's one thing that, -- very friendly. You don't hear nobody killin' nobody. You don't hear no go stealin'. But like I say, I wouldn't live there. So when I used to go vacation there, I used to go with my — then my son-in-law was from there. His family came, too, over here. And they used to go there; I used to go with them.

LEVINE: Were you pleased that your daughter married someone who had come from there as well?

CUNHA: Well, I didn't care. No, I didn't care who she—she liked him. She was sixteen years old when she got married. I didn't like it, because I had different plans for her. But they wanted to get married, I says, "Okay." I went—first I said no, that she couldn't get married until she was eighteen. And I was working, and I had a friend, Italian woman friend in the shop. And I told her, and she says, "You know, if I was you I'd let them get married, because if they do want to get married, they do something that you will have them married." Because in those days, it wasn't like today. Today they just get together, just like nothing! But those days, it wasn't. So, I come home—he's older than her, eight years. So he used to come over, and his mother was—we were very friends anyways. And I told him, I says, "You know, she's only a school kid." She didn't even finish high school. I says, "You think she can take care of a house?" I says, "She does a little cooking, she does the little things," because when I go to work, I used to write a note, leave her a note with, after she come from school, what to do. So my husband was a very good man. He used to help me around the—I worked all the time, but he used to help me around the house and all that. So my son-in-law, he turned around and he says, "Well, I see Mr. Cunha helping you. I can do the same thing." I says, "Okay, if you want to get married, go ahead." They got married. They got the four boys. After the four boys, she went back to school, back to school. She went and take a course in Fall River at night. I was working, and I used to stay with the four boys, with my husband at night, and she used to go to Fall River to Durfey? [PH]Durfey School, I think it was. And she used to study at home. Then she went to Bo,--- after she, she went to Boston to get her dipl--- high school diploma.

And then she had my granddaughter. She had the five then, the four boys and her [laughs]. She went to Fall River again, to that Durfey School, and got some papers. She used to go at night; I used to take care of the kids. And she became a school teacher, high school. She teaches the deaf and dumb.

LEVINE: Oh, that's wonderful. Well, we're right near the end of the tape, so I want to ask you if there's anything else that you would like to say about having started out in one country, came her, went back, came here, and lived really most of your life here?

CUNHA: Yes. Like I say, I love it here, and I built the house there, so when we wanted to go for vacation, we have our house. But, like I say, I have my heart there because I was born there, but I wouldn't want to live there. I love United States! I wouldn't trade it for nothin' in the world! That's where I made my livin', and happy livin'. I always had, after I—especially after I got married—a very, very happy life.

LEVINE: That's wonderful.

CUNHA: And still today. My husband died already it's going to be twenty years in --- the twenty-sixth of August. So we had this house; we had a will for one another. And then after a year, after he died a year, I told him --- I told my son-in-law and Dorothy, I says, "I'm not going to take care of the house." I pass it to their name. I'm here, they're there. When I want to go, they're willing to go. They don't go nowhere that--if I don't go, it's because I don't want to go.

LEVINE: Okay, we're going to close here, and I want to say thank you, Mrs. Cunha.

CUNHA: I thank you. I liked it!

LEVINE: This was a very, very interesting story. I'm sure there's even more to be told! But we'll stop here. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW