

Antonio Santos - Oral History

Date: March 8, 2012

Location: New Bedford, MA

Interviewer: David Martins

Interviewees: Mrs. Antonio Santos (Maria Natália Pereira Santos), Mr. Joe Santos (son), Mr. Mario Santos (son)

(The interview took place at Sacred Heart Nursery in New Bedford where Mr. Antonio Santos resides. He suffers from Alzheimer's disease and was not able to answer questions. His wife and sons answered the questions).

DAVID: I'm putting this here to record our conversation. First I will ask you some questions and then we'll chat, so that we can record this history. Here we have a pamphlet that explains the archives that the Center for Portuguese Studies has at UMASS Dartmouth, where we'll be depositing information about what the Portuguese went through when they came to this country. It's interesting. I just have to turn on my computer because I forgot the hardcopies.

JOE: You want this table over there?

DAVID: That's fine. So where do you work Joe?

JOE: I work at General Dynamics, it's in Taunton, Massachusetts. There's a corporate park up there, right off of 495.

DAVID: What kind of stuff do you do there?

JOE: We do mostly communication systems for the military.

DAVID: How long have you work there?

JOE: Going on 18 years.

DAVID: 18 years? That's a long time.

JOE: David, you were saying that you have talked with Manuel Vinagre about his father? Who else have you met with?

DAVID: That's it so far. Afterward, I would also like to talk to Carlos Vinagre who lives Rodney French...

MRS. SANTOS: Carlos Vinagre who lives over there on the beach?

DAVID: Yes, exactly. I'm also going to talk with Armando Estudante (but Armando is yonger) and various other people. I have a list.

DAVID: Ok, what's his full name?

MRS. SANTOS: António da Silva Santos.

DAVID: António da Silva Santos. And when was he born?

MRS. SANTOS: November 14, 1929.

DAVID: And where was he born?

MRS. SANTOS: Figueira da Foz, Lavos, Gala. Back then Gala belonged to the parish of Lavos. Now we have our own parish in Gala, it's called São Pedro.

DAVID: What is Mrs Santos's citizenship?

MRS. SANTOS: My husband's? He has been Canadian, American and Portuguese.

JOE: He still has all three?

MRS. SANTOS: Yes. He took up American and Canadian citizenship. First, he was Portuguese, then Canadian and then American.

DAVID: And how many languages does he speak? Did he speak English?

MRS. SANTOS: He used to speak English well. But now, he speaks neither English nor Portuguese.

DAVID: And his occupation was always...

MRS. SANTOS: Fisherman. But when he ran away from the codfishing boat, he worked in farms; and construction; and in foundries, making iron things; and on the trash trucks, at the university.

DAVID: And when he ran away he ran away to where?

MRS. SANTOS: He ran away from North Sidney, Canada. The boat went there to get bait. He was on a codfishing boat and he ran away with a friend, a co-worker, who was from Ílhavo. They came to get them from Toronto to go work. He started working on a farm, picking onions, picking carrots, picking tobacco. He also picked eathwoms, at night, with a flashlight. But that was not what he was trained to do, so he went to Nova Scotia, to Loursbourg and there he went fishing, but always on the run; illegal. But after having worked there for three years, the company he worked for told him to turn himself in at the immigration office so that he could become legal. But when he turned himself in to the immigration authorities, a new minister had come in and had changed the thing to five years, and he was caught. But the chief of immigration... He was supposed to wait for the Gil Eanes¹ to bring him back to Portugal, but he said to the chief that he wanted to pay for things himself so that he could go by plane; he did

¹ The Gil Eanes was a Portuguese government ship that provided medical assistance to the cod fishing fleets of Portugal and other countries on the Newfoundland and Greenland seas. The ship not only served as a hospital, but also delivered mail, was used as a towboat and as an icebreaker, and even ensured the supply of provisions, nets, fishing gear, fuel, freshwater and bait for the cod fishing fleets.

not want to have to wait for the Gil Eanes. So the chief gave him three additional months to go fishing so that he could save money for the fare.

When he arrived in Lisbon, he had no documents; he had no passport, nothing. So, the airport authorities caught him and he was arrested. He was arrested and then he telephoned me to Figueira, that's where I was living, and I went to meet him in Lisbon. He was in jail, there in Lisbon.

DAVID: And what was the year?

MRS. SANTOS: The year? Oh that, exactly...?

JOE: How old was he?

MRS. SANTOS: When he jumped ship? He was... He must have been 32. Well, Mario was six months when he left... Mario was born in 1960. He must have jumped ship in 61. My son was six months when he ran. It was in 61. Only this way...

DAVID: So, he arrived in Lisbon and called you in Feigueira...

MRS. SANTOS: For me to go meet him. Then that night he was taken to Porto, because the boat he was in belonged to Porto (It was called Vila do Conde), and that's where he was taken. He was there for a month, in jail. Then, we started talking to influential people, asking favors... But there, the people felt sorry for him. They took him and put him upstairs, cleaning offices, carrying papers here and there, so that he would not be with the prisoners. Only at night would he go back to the thing... He was there for a month, in jail. After, he came back to Figueira, to my hometown. There, in Figueira, it was as if he were at home. The jailer who was in charge of the prisoners would send him to the headquarters, which was attached to the military headquarters, to get food for the prisoners. He was the one sent to get the food. His friends would go there and they would make fish stews, grill sardines... He would spend the time, the day, pleasantly. Then, at night, he would come home. And the jailer... Nobody knew. He would come home and at dawn he would go back. He was there for four months; he was released around Christmas.

Then the company where he had worked in Nova Scotia (They liked him because he was a good fisherman, knowledgeable about nets, and fishing techniques.), gave him a work contract. He was in jail and I was the one that took care of all the paperwork. All he had to do was sign. In August, he got out at Christmas and in August we all came to Canada: I, he and my two sons. This one; the other was not born yet. We went to Nova Scotia. We were there for two years, in Nova Scotia. Then, since I was not working and he was not earning much, he thought of going somewhere else. He came to Vancouver. He comes to Vancouver, but...

DAVID: How did you go to Vancouver?

MRS. SANTOS: He went by train. They went by train. And so did I, with my sons. We went afterward; after he was already on a boat, that's when we went. We went, and one of my brothers stayed in the little house that we had already bought. My brother stayed in the house and my children and I went, by train. Three days and three nights by train to...

DAVID: It's a long distance...

MRS. SANTOS: Until Montreal we did not have beds, after Montreal we had beds. The beds were made and unmade every day.

DAVID: And what type of fishing did he do in Vancouver?

MRS. SANTOS: It was dragging, like here. Dragging for codfish... All kinds of fish. That's what it was.

DAVID: And when he went to Vancouver, when was that?

MRS. SANTOS: When he went to Vancouver it was the same. But there, in Vancouver, he was not allowed to go fishing. It was a different organization and they did not allow him to go fishing without his being.... Without having his Canadian citizenship papers. But a man who was a very good friend of his, in whose hotel he had stayed when he arrived in Vancouver (The second time, with my father, actually. My father went to work in a farm and he went fishing.) got a licence in his own name (His name was also António) and loaned it to him so that he could work. But someone from our town (Not exactly our town; we are from Gala and the person who informed the authorities was from Buarcos.) informed the authorities that he was fishing without proper documents. On the day that I arrived in Vancouver with my sons, no sooner had we arrived with our luggage and the police was knocking at our door. We did not know anything. We were not familiar with the laws or anything else. My boys said that the father was at sea. When he came back from fishing the police was waiting for him. The case went to court. But he only had to pay a one hundred dollar fine for himself and one hundred dollars for the man that had loaned him the licence. He paid 200 dollars. Well, he did not go fishing again there. That's when he went to work in construction. And then he went to work on the garbage trucks, at the university... The students... And he was collecting trash... Then he started thinking "this is not my kind of life." That's when he came here to American, as a tourist. From Canada, he came here as a tourist. Then he went to work on a boat belonging to a man from Mainland Portugal and that man gave him a work contract. He engaged a lawyer who took care of things for him and within six months we were all here in America. That's how our life was.

Then he worked here. He was skipper of the Gertrude E.; he worked for Mário Vinagre, who owned a boat named Lady Jo. He was also skipper of that boat; was also skipper of the Luso American I. And then he thought about buying a boat. So we bought a boat. It was called Santo António. And that's how our life was.

DAVID: And after the Santo António, did he buy the T. Luís?

MRS. SANTOS: No, not after the Santo António. My son was working on the Santo António, but we still had the Santo António when my son bought another one called Sancor. Only afterward did he sell the Sancor, that belonged to him and a partner, and buy the T. Luis. But it was his father who loaned him the money. Well, father is father. But he paid him back; he paid everything back.

He was very, like, to me; he did a lot of things that he shouldn't have done, like going out having a good time, but he was a very hard worker and he did not want his children to be wanting for anything.

DAVID: When you came here from Vancouver, did you come directly to New Bedford or did you stop Gloucester?

15:00 mark

MRS. SANTOS: No, when we came from Vancouver (This one was already born, he was a baby, I had him in Vancouver.) we stopped in Mex... No, it was in a place called... We boarded in Seattle, which is already in American, and then we changed in, I don't know, Chicago? It was in Chicago, it was in Chicago, that's what it was. It only took us less than a day; from Vancouver here it took two days and three nights by train.

DAVID: You came directly to New Bedford or did you go to Provincetown?

MRS. SANTOS: No, no. We got off in Boston and then this man who is a cousin of his, Tó Vidal (I don't know if you know him. He's our cousin.), was the one who went to pick us up in Boston. And the next day he went to pick up our luggage. We came by train so that we could bring some things; some of the best things we had, because by plane we could not bring everything. And then we went to live in the home of an aunt of his, her name was Balbina. We lived there for a month. We rented an apartment for six months and then we bought our own home, which is the home where I still live.

But before he came, before he came... Before coming to Canada, before jumping ship in Canada, he was shipwreck. He was 14 when he first went to sea, when he started working on the sardine trawlers (He was still single.), then he went codfishing when he was 19.

DAVID: And for how many years was he on the codfishing ships?

MRS. SANTOS: Fourteen years. Fourteen years. The first codfishing ship he went on was the Ana I. It sank and they were picked up and came home on the Gil Eanes. Then that boat, the Ana I, owned another boat. It was called João Costa. He went to work on that boat, the João Costa. He worked there for three years. After three years, the João Costa sank. Already close to here, in from of the Azores, already close to Figueira.

DAVID: I remember reading an article about that.

MRS. SANTOS: They were on the lifeboats for seven days and he was one of the first to be picked up. He was picked up by a boat called Compass; it was a foreign boat. Afterward... They were four men to each lifeboat. Then he was the one that communicated what had happened to them. And then that Compass was the one that informed the others, that informed Portugal and such. It was after that they they went to rescue the others.

DAVID: And when he went... When they picked him up from the sea, where did they take him? Was it Ponta Delgada?

MRS. SANTOS: No, it was to the Algarve, to Sines. And then from Sines he came by train to Figueira.

DAVID: And when that happened were you notified?

MRS. SANTOS: I was still single and he was single as well. We were married that year. This happened in 1952.

DAVID: In 1952?

MRS. SANTOS: 1952 was the year that I got married. I got married after he came back from being shipwrecked.

DAVID: But when that happened did you get any news about what had happened?

MRS. SANTOS: No, no! Nobody knew because they did not have time to communicate. Nobody knew. Only when they heard the [Grunts] Compass communicating the thing did they start... But they were already suspicious because they were overdue. They were... They should have arrived a week earlier. That was the week... They were already close to the Azores when that happened. They were coming in, loaded with codfish.

DAVID: It was fortunate that they were found.

MRS. SANTOS: Found... Fortunate... It was, indeed. For water, at night they would spread out the boat's sail. Then, it would rain and they saved the water to drink. They ate a turtle. They caught a turtle at sea and ate it. In his boat they killed the dog. It was rumored that it was to eat him, but the others said no, that it was so he would not go mad; they did not have anything to feed the little dog, so they killed him. That's how it was. It was very extreme, very sad. This was only known afterward, when people heard that Compass tell on the radio how they had picked up like... Only then... There were a lot of people from my hometown then [involved in the shipwreck] and most of them single; single young men.

DAVID: How about his life, when he was young? For example, how did he choose to go fishing?

MRS. SANTOS: His father was also a fisherman.

DAVID: His father was a fisherman.

MRS. SANTOS: He started out on the river, there, with his father. Then he went on to the sardine trawlers. That was his way of life. It was fishing. Fishing.

DAVID: Did he attend fisheries school there?

MRS. SANTOS: No, he never attended that school. One of his brothers did attend the fisheries school in Lisbon; he went to the thing, the school. And one of my brothers also attended, but he did not; he never attended.

And when he jumped ship in North Sidney, he was already carrying that idea in his head. He had already made plans with the cook's assistant. They had saved bottles of whiskey, so that they could sell them, when they went ashore, to make money for transportation! [laughter]

DAVID: And when he was not fishing what did he do? For example, he would go on the codfishing boats for six months...

MRS. SANTOS: And six months he would go [fishing] there, on the river, with some little nets we had and I would go to the river with him. They called them "atalhos", which are a sort of circle, and "botirões." They would throw those "botirões" and then the fish would go in. And I would go with him.

DAVID: You went with him!? And then you would sell that fish?

MRS. SANTOS: And then we would sell the fish. We would go [fishing] at night and early in the morning we would sell the fish. But when he was on the Vila do Conde he was no longer fishing on the river; he would go work on the same boat. In the winter he would stay working on the boat – painting the boat; fixing things up there, on the boat. Unloading the boat... During the winter he would stay there, in Porto, working on the boat. He would come home every other week. Every other week.. [Grunts]

DAVID: And how did you feel then? His way of life, there, on the codfishing boats; that was a dangerous way of life...

MRS. SANTOS: That was a sad way of life, but we were used to it. We [the women] even wore dark clothes when they went on the codfishing trips; we would not go out anywhere; just stuck to our routines, our work. I worked in a fish..., a sardine warehouse. I would go there early in the morning and would only come home at night. An aunt of mine was the one who took care of my two sons. (She actually lived with me.) She would feed them; she was the one who took care of them – my aunt/godmother. It was as if she was the mother of my sons. She was the who cooked and everything, and took care of them. This way I could put in as many hours as they had for me.

DAVID: And was it sad when he left?

MRS. SANTOS: Oh, yes! We cried out loud; there was a lot of crying on that... In Lisbon, at the docks. We would go to see them off. We didn't know if we would see them again. And then when they returned there was a lot of joy! We would wear new clothes. We would buy new clothes for the children. [Grunts] Everybody would wear new outfits.

DAVID: And going to Figueira back then, was it by train from Figueira to Lisbon?

MRS. SANTOS: It was by train. To Figueira [from Gala, our village] it was by foot. We would go on foot because the bridge was closer... Now it is farther because the [new] bridge was located more toward the thing... But when we used the bridge that was located right there close to the train station we would always walk [to Figueir]..

DAVID: Very well. So he learned the art of fishing from his father...

MRS. SANTOS: From his father. Yes, codfishing he learned with his father.

DAVID: And his father and his mother, were they from there, from Figueira, as well?

MRS. SANTOS: From Figueira. They were my aunt and uncle. He is my first cousin. His father was my father's brother.

DAVID: Was he involved in any...? Were there any fishing organizations, any type of union related to fishing or not?

MRS. SANTOS: To fishing...? When they were young [Grunts] they had that greed. He was always among the first; he was very driven. He would take his own lines and hooks so that he would not have to ask the captain in case he lost one. He always had those spare ones, so that he always had a supply. So that he would always be one of the "first lines."² He was always... He was sick for a whole month once, one year he was sick for a month (He got better later) and he was still able to catch up to the "First Line." He was very... And he was lucky.

DAVID: Exactly. But you had to be ambitious to make money.

MRS. SANTOS: Yeah, yeah, he was ambitious.

DAVID: Ok, we have already talked about the type of boat he was on and the gear... How about the crew on the codfishing boats, was it made up of people from Figueira?
já falamos do tipo de barco que ele andava e os aparelhos. E a companha dele que ia lá nos bacalhoeiros, era gente da Figueira?

MRS. SANTOS: It was people from Figueira, and from Porto, and from Vila do Conde... On the one he was on when he took off, there was a cousin of mine. He had taken him along the year before, as a "green". They called them "green" when they went fishing for the first time, they were called "greens."

JOE: Greenhorn.

DAVID: Oh yeah, yeah.

MRS. SANTOS: And he was the one who took that cousin of mine. And then, the second year, when he ran away, my cousin was also there. And then the captain even stopped supplying my cousin with bait, saying he knew about his having left the boat. But my cousin didn't know anything because he didn't say anything to anyone, not even to my cousin.

[Voices of people coming into the room]

JOE: This is my brother Mario

DAVID: Hi, nice to meet you, Mario.

Mario: Your name?

DAVID: David.

² The "First Line" (*Primeira Linha*) was the fisherman who caught the most fish.

MARIO: Nice to meet you. Is he asleep or is he faking it? Resting his eyes. Well, thanks for giving us this opportunity to talk to him and get his story out.

DAVID: Joe set it all up; set everything up. I've come to find out that I've been on your brother's boat doing research in the past. We did some cod-tagging studies; we were putting tags on the cod to see where they migrate to and stuff. It was back in 2004 and then we did it again in 2005. It's funny how it's a small world. But yeah, join us.

JOE: So, the codfishing fishing, they used to actually use lines with hooks.

DAVID: Yup.

JOE: That's what she was talking about, that he'd bring on extras so that he wouldn't have to ask anybody. [Grunts]

DAVID: I got a good description about the fishery from Manuel Vinagre. Manuel Vinagre explained explained quite a bit about how they used dories, how the big boat would leave them and then it would just stay adrift and they would have to find the big boat again. And how there were special whistles...

MRS. SANTOS: Whistles for them to find their way when it was foggy. They would sound the horn for them to come back to the ship.

DAVID: Right.

MRS. SANTOS: Many would get lost. They would end up at other boats. Codfishing was a very difficult life. And then they got nothing. The only thing we received was their subsidy. Forty dollars, [I mean] forty *escudos*, per moth, back then, for the children.

MARIO: What?

MRS. SANTOS: Forty *escudos* a month that the children would get as a sub...; that they would get from the child subsidy fund. And then when he was arrested...

MARIO: Who paid that?

MRS. SANTOS: It was the government. The fisheries government.

DAVID: To help; to help support the children.

30:00 minute mark

MRS. SANTOS: And you know, there was a year when he did not go codfishing; he stayed home punished. Because whenever he saw one of his friends [in trouble] he would take their side. He was very, like... and the ship's mate (he was in a ship called António Ribau) got into some fight and he jumped in to help him. And then the government penalized him. He was

barred from codfishing for one year. But he went fishing on the river; he had the little nets... but by the grace of God, well, we survived. And the year went by fast.

DAVID: And besides that sinking... He was in two, wasn't he?

MRS. SANTOS: Yes, but one, you know, he was rescued right away; he went right to the Gil Eanes. Another boat picked him up, there, on the fishing grounds; he was still fishing [when the mother ship sank].

MARIO: Do you know what the Gil Eanes is? It's a floating hospital that they have out in Canada; it was called Gil Eanes. I guess he was an old president of Portugal, Gil Eanes.³ That's the boat. If you got sick you would go on that boat, floating hospital.

MRS. SANTOS: The Gil Eanes was their hospital; it had doctors and so...

DAVID: Exactly. And male nurses...

MRS. SANTOS: And then they came to... But they were almost ready to come back to Portugal. They came back right away. Now, on the João Costa, that was dangerous.

DAVID: Right, right. And besides those two incidents, did anything else happen [Grunts] that put his life in jeopardy? Storms...?

MRS. SANTOS: Here, yes, they would get storms. One time he got so much ice that you could barely see the boat. It was all ice cables; those ice things... I don't know how they were able to sail home.

MARIO: I was there, on the boat, that time.

MRS. SANTOS: I never saw so much ice!

MARIO: Coming back, we, we had to be out there with the pick, scaping the ice from the windows every ten minutes.

MARIO: My son, here, also has been... It was one year, wasn't it, that you were fishing?

DAVID: What year was that?

MARIO: 80, I want to say, 79-80.

MRS. SANTOS: When we bought the boat, [Grunts] he went fishing to help us because we had to borrow [Grunts], for the down payment; we did not have enough money. We needed \$70,000 and, at that time, we only had \$65,000. And also for expenses and so forth, we had to borrow \$10,000. So he went fishing and helped us. He gave us half. Not half of his check, it

³ Gil Eanes was a 15th-century Portuguese navigator and explorer Eanes at the service of Prince Henry the Navigator. He made a number of voyages along the African coast. In his voyage in 1433, he sailed along Africa's coast, reaching the Canary Islands. His discovery of a safe passage around Cape Bojador in 1434 marked the beginning of Portugal's exploration of Africa.

was half of... He used to make some money on the side. Now they don't, now they are not allowed, but then... He also gave me half of the money he made on the side. Then he got mad at his father or the father got mad at him because...

MARIO: No, father did not understand. He asked me what I wanted to do with my life and, at the time, I was thinking of going to school, the University of Rhode Island, URI, for oceanography and marine biology. I was thinking about it, but I did not how to explain it to him, how to say in Portuguese, and told him that I wanted to study fish. He understood that I wanted to go fishing. He got "I want to go fishing" instead of "I want to study the fish." After, I wanted to go to school and they didn't want me to go. You did not want me to go because I was making a lot of money.

MRS. SANTOS: You were making a lot of money and we were in need of money.

DAVID: Back then it was like that...

MRS. SANTOS: Back then we were in need.

DAVID: And they used to take the children out of school so they would go work in the factories or fishing...

MRS. SANTOS: He also worked in a factory with me for a year.

MARIO: That's why they got mad at me, because I said "I'm leaving, I'm going back to school."

MRS. SANTOS: After that the father said that he did not want him on the boat anymore. — "I don't want you here on the boat any longer." But later he wanted to take him back. He lost a man (He got sick. That was Quim Manuel, Pedro's father.) and he wanted to take him. And I said "You did not want him when he was there, now he is not going! If he finds another boat, he will go, but if he doesn't he will find another way of life." That's when he thought of going to school. [Grunts]

MARIO: I had already said that. I had already thought about going to school.

MRS. SANTOS: But you never told me that you wanted...

MARIO: I didn't tell you? I told Father and I told you that I didn't want to go fishing anymore. And father said "Why would you want to give up a job where you are making so much money?" That's what he told me. I remember it very well.

MRS. SANTOS: OK. If that's what it was, if you say so...

DAVID: The person that you mentioned, Quim, Quim Manuel, who is Pedro's father, is that Pedro Cura?

MRS. SANTOS: No, it's Pereira, Pedro Pereira.

MARIO: He's a photographer for *The Standard Times*.

DAVID: Ok, yeah, yeah, yeah, ok. I know Peter.

MRS. SANTOS: That one, he had studied in Portugal and he came to this country and had to be bossed by others too.

MARIO: He was... He had an education, but he had also studied to be a mate.

MRS. SANTOS: He had studied to be a captain there, from the fishing fleet, the...

MARIO: Merchant marine. I think he was qualified for a captain or navigator or something like that.

DAVID: And how was life onboard when he was on the codfishing boat? How did he spend his free time? What did they do, when they were not fishing, for example?

[GRUNTS]

MRS. SANTOS: I don't know...

MARIO: They played cards and dominos...

MRS. SANTOS: I don't know that. I don't know. But it was more a time for them to prepatate the bait. The bait and the cables they used for the hooks; they wer always working...

DAVID: But, for example, was there no music? They didn't sing?

MARIO: They didn't have time for that; it was preparation for the next haul...

JOE: Launch.

DAVID: Makes sense. Did he have contact with fishermen from other countries when he was fishing for cod, or not really? Maybe?

[Grunts]

MRS. SANTOS: Friends of his?

DAVID: Yes. Were they all Portuguese?

MRS. SANTOS: Yes, they were Portuguese.

DAVID: But he did not have contacts with other countries?

MRS. SANTOS: No. After he came to Can... [unintelligible], that's when he started having Canadian contacts.

MARIO: Did you show him that picture?

JOE: Yeah, that's the little boat he was on in Portugal [?] It was in the email I sent.

DAVID: I've got that, yeah. In a folder somewhere. And I found this other story too. No, I think you sent me this other one too.

[Recording ends abruptly]