

FR: This tape is the property of Tales of Cape Cod, Incorporated and cannot be reproduced without their written permission. This is May 26, 1978, and we are at the home of Mrs. Mary Isabelle Madeiros, who lives at 216 Main Street in Cotuit, Mass. Mrs. Madeiros was born on September 21, 1902, making her 76 years of age. Mrs. Madeiros, are you native to the Cape?

MM: Yes, I am. I was born [inaudible].

FR: And you were born when?

MM: I was born in 1902, September 1902.

FR: Do you recall your grandparents?

MM: I certainly do. My grandparents – I always knew them because they came naturally before I was born here.

FR: Where did they come from?

MM: St. Michael, Azores.

Unknown: Portugal.

FR: And what do you recall about them?

MM: Well, I recall that they were hardworking people. I mean, he didn't really have much, but he built this little home and worked real hard, and they were just grateful, nice people.

FR: How did he earn a living?

MM: By agriculture – farming and working very little, which was – there wasn't much work in those days. They managed somehow.

FR: Did they sell the things they grew?

MM: Yes. They sold the things they grew and, of course, used them for themselves, too. But mostly in the summer, strawberries, and even beans and potatoes and stuff like that they'd sell.

FR: Did you tell me they used the barter system at the store?

MM: Somewhat. If people had potatoes or eggs or anything like that, stores would take it, and they would reduce their grocery bill. So made it nice.

FR: Was this your maternal grandparents or your paternal?

MM: This was my mother's side of the family.

FR: What did your father do?

MM: Well, he did most everything. He was a farmer, and he had a small bog and worked for other people, also. When they opened up the telephone and electric lines, he helped to cut – it all was done by hand. When they opened the line, the stumps or whatever they needed to cut down was done that way. So he did a lot of work that way in the winter. Plus, cutting wood. And then he had a horse, and he'd plow out in the spring gardens for people, and he farmed all he could. So that's how he made a living.

FR: What did your mother do?

MM: Well, she was just home – housewife. She sewed and preserved and just –in the fall, sometimes, she'd screen cranberries.

FR: What do you mean, screen cranberries?

MM: Well, when they pick the cranberries, they put them in the bog house, and then they screen them afterward. They go up and separate them, and then they go in a screener. They take out the rotten berries because the separator takes out the vines.

FR: They screen the size?

MM: The screen – no, they just screen – take out the white ones and the poor ones. She did that a little.

FR: Do you remember what she'd get paid for doing that?

MM: Ten cents an hour. Ten cents an hour. Then it went up to two hours for a quarter. Isn't that terrible? [laughter]

FR: What did your husband do?

MM: My husband. After he come home from the service, he learned a carpenter's trade, and that was in 1922 when he came out of the service.

FR: Where did he build the homes?

MM: Well, he worked with Mr. John Fish and [inaudible] Hamlin – Cotuit, wherever. And then he helped build our own home because he didn't know much about carpentry then.

FR: That's the home you're in now.

MM: Yes, the home we're in now. Yes.

FR: What did you pay for land and the home? Do you recall?

MM: Well, for the first acre, we paid three hundred dollars, and that was in about 1920, I think.

FR: What does that land assess for now?

MM: About seventeen thousand now. [laughter]

FR: Do you recall what the house cost you?

MM: Yes. At the time, we only built the four rooms downstairs. Of course, no improvements. No bathroom. And after the basement was – we had to have the basement and a pump before anybody would loan you money. So after we got that lot, the basement, and the pump, then they loaned us thirty-one hundred dollars.

FR: Mortgage?

MM: Mortgage. Yeah. We had shares of two-thousand dollars, which was ten dollars a month, and we kept that. And then Mr. Oliver (Cotton?) loaned us the money. And then when the shares matured, we gave him the two thousand, which – well, we owed eleven hundred. But that was even harder to pay than the first two thousand because the Depression came in.

FR: What year did you build the house?

MM: 1922.

FR: What were the taxes then?

MM: Well, it was less than eighty dollars.

FR: What are they now?

MM: Six-fifty now. Yeah.

FR: Tell me how your husband had the cellar dug. He hired some people –

MM: Yes. My father let him have the scoop. He dug out the soil. He dug it all by hand.

FR: What kind of a scoop was it?

MM: It's a funny, old-fashioned scoop. Just dug up sand. I supposed something like these; only they didn't go as deep. One horse to pull it. It couldn't take that much. But it did help a lot.

FR: It was pulled by a horse.

MM: Pulled by a horse. And then, after that, it was all done with a shovel.

FR: And he hired some people?

MM: He didn't hire anybody until [inaudible] cement. And then he hired for one day to fill the [inaudible] or two days maybe it was.

FR: That was some Indians he hired?

MM: Yes. The [inaudible].

FR: How did he motivate them?

MM: Well, [inaudible] to work very hard, but he told them if he got the foundation filled that afternoon on the second day, that he would get them some booze, and he did – moonshine.

FR: Was that during prohibition?

MM: Yeah, during probation. And he got a quart of moonshine, and then they were very happy with that, and then they did – they finished. [laughter]

FR: That was a little bonus.

MM: That was a bonus. [laughter]

FR: You mentioned prohibition. Do you recall anything about it?

MM: Well, I recall at the time that those fellows got hurt when they did that bootlegging. They went to get the liquor. I don't know. They already sold it. I forget now just how it was. One man got killed, and the other got severely wounded. I used to go down to the beach and drag it in with – that went on for some time before I ever even knew about it until they got hurt.

FR: Did you know of anybody making their own liquor?

MM: Yes, I did. Yeah. I knew one man that did.

FR: How did he do that?

MM: Well, he said he did it in his basement. He kept his teakettle going all the time through his copper pipes. I don't know how he learned to do it. It's pretty hard stuff, I guess. [laughter]

FR: What did it make it with?

MM: He used to make it [from] molasses and sugar, I guess, and made a batch. I don't know just how he made it. But I know my father rented a home he had in Newtown, and he didn't know that these people were going to – just purposely hired to moonshine, and they did.

FR: And did they sell it?

MM: Yes, they did until they got caught. And then they questioned my father because they – he didn't know that's what they were doing [inaudible] Newtown.

FR: Did they sentence them to anything?

MM: Yeah, they did. They sentenced them – I forget just how much it was, and this man bragged that underneath the seat, he had a tank with moonshine, and the cops didn't find it. When he got out of jail, he went right [to] sell it, and he made enough for the fine. [laughter] They said that when the police were raiding, they were hidden in (corn shucks?), and they saw it all happen. The police didn't find them, either. The minute they got out, well, they – of course, they did arrest them. [laughter]

FR: How many members were in your immediate family?

MM: Let me see. Well, you mean in the home?

FR: Yeah. Home. When you were young.

MM: Just two brothers and myself, three, and my father and mother make five.

FR: What would be a day in your life in your early days? What would you – you'd get up and have breakfast, and what would you do from then on?

MM: Well, I suppose very much like today, ordinarily. We didn't have as many things done for us. We just played with each other and had games. We seemed to get along all right. A big event was the Barnstable Fair, and then the movies, the silent movies, was quite a thing in those days.

FR: What was the Barnstable Fair like?

MM: Oh, it was wonderful.

FR: What did they have there?

MM: Like today, it's everything. They had exhibits, horse racing, which was wonderful. People loved that. My father [inaudible] really nice. Just like it is today. Only, of course, I think as a child you think it's better because you don't have as much.

FR: What was your parental home like?

MM: Almost like it is today, only, of course, we didn't have electricity. We'd have the bathroom [inaudible] house. But we thought it was lovely, you know?

FR: What did you use for lights?

MM: Kerosene for lights.

FR: Did you have chores?

MM: Well, we brought in wood. Of course, there were eggs to gather, and my brothers would clean the chicken house. We'd always had chores – something to do. Get bedding for the horse and the cow my father had and little things like that. Then, evenings we played games – dominos, cards, things like that. We seemed to be happy.

FR: What kind of toys did you have?

MM: Not many. A ball. I don't know what my brothers had, really. I can't remember. They didn't have much. They seemed to be contented, though. If you don't have it, you don't miss it, I guess. [laughter]

FR: Did you have pets?

MM: Yes, we had pets. We always had a dog and a cat, or maybe two cats. Yeah.

FR: How would you get to school?

MM: Walk. Had to walk to school.

FR: How far was it?

MM: Well, I don't know. From our home Cotuit [inaudible] – almost two miles it must be. Of course, at nine o'clock, you'd have to start – it would take about twenty minutes of brisk walking and part running. Of course, the Santuit School was closer – was right here until the sixth grade. Then to the seventh grade, you had to go to the grammar school.

FR: What was the Santuit School like?

MM: Well, it was all one room. She had as much as forty pupils at one time for one teacher.

FR: How many grades did she teach?

MM: Just six. Yeah. When she had six, then she had an assistant that would come in and help out different classes. And then, of course, in those days, we had – the music teacher would come once a week. It was different than now. And then, the drawing teacher, the art teacher, would come once a week, so we didn't have – that day she'd come.

FR: Do you remember her well?

MM: Oh, yeah, Mrs. Maynard, yes.

FR: Tell us about her.

MM: Well, she was a nice, quiet lady. Mrs. Maynard was the art teacher. And Miss Hawthorne was the music teacher. And then Mr. (Gouger?) was the [inaudible]. We liked him a lot. He used to bring a horse and buggy, tie it there. He was nice. He always had something nice to say. He was a very nice old man.

FR: Would you have lunch there?

MM: I'd go home for lunch. Some children would bring lunches. People living way at Newtown and, believe it or not, they had an awful long walk. Gee, I don't know. Must be four miles. And, of course, they'd miss school a lot. And then somebody saw to it that they had a bus, school bus, which was drawn by a horse. It was a made-over hearse, believe it or not. And then they'd take them. One of the boys – the sons would drive the bus, and I don't think it took over seven or eight children, way up there. They didn't get much. I mean, very small pay. But they were glad to get that because it saved them walking.

FR: What time would you get through school?

MM: Three o'clock. From 8:30 to three. And then after, they changed it to nine o'clock.

FR: Did you have more chores to do after school?

MM: Not too much. Sometimes the cow would be in the pasture, and my brothers would have to get it [inaudible] pasture for the cow. Small chores. Not much.
[laughter]

FR: What was the school like? The building itself?

MM: Well, it was a nice building. It was heated by a big wood stove, and the janitor would come in the morning and light it, and it was great. We thought it was nice. It's very much like, well, the Cotuit school. It's about the same – desks and – you know, it's all right. Of course, it didn't have – we had a water tank for water and then, of course, the outhouse on one side of the building.

FR: The clothing you wore, you and your brothers and mother and father. Where did they get that?

MM: Well, Mrs. [inaudible] would come from Hyannis with a horse-drawn wagon, and she would bring things and then, if they didn't have just what she'd measure, and then she'd bring. It was mostly everyday clothes, not dress-up clothes. And yard goods, shirts – common, everyday clothes. And she'd come – once a week, anyway, she'd come. And then they'd order that way. Made it nice because transportation was horses, and not even everybody had a horse. So that made it real nice.

FR: Were a lot of the clothes made?

MM: Yes. Most of the clothes were made, especially those that knew how. Even boys' clothes they would make. They'd [inaudible] for knowing how. They taught that. Others were bought ready-made, like pants and things like that.

FR: Where would you buy shoes, rubbers, and stuff?

MM: That you'd have to go to the store – our grocery store, they would have boys' shoes. Used to be [inaudible] store. He'd sell hay, grain, and groceries, and you could buy boys' shoes and men's shoes there. But if you wanted dress-up shoes, you'd have to go to Hyannis.

FR: Was much done by mail order?

MM: Quite a bit. [inaudible] another company. I forget the name now. They're out of business now, but, yeah, most of it was done by mail.

FR: What were weekends like?

MM: Oh, weekends were – people visited more. I remember my father used to harness up the horse, and we'd go to South Sandwich to see his brother, and then us children would play in the pond, and they had goats and get goat rides with wagons. It was nice, you know?

[Recording paused.]

FR: What would you do on weekends?

MM: As I said, we went to the – played around the pond. And then the men would play horseshoe. That’s about all, you know. Different things. I guess you forget.

FR: That was some of what you did for entertainment.

MM: Yes. Yes.

FR: Did you go to dances later on?

MM: Not too much; we didn't. We didn't have a place to go, really. I forget the year that Baxter Hall was built, and I was quite a big girl then. That’s when the start of it – in those early days, people entertained more at home. And they’d go to the movies.

FR: Where were the movies held?

MM: At Freedom Hall in Cotuit. Silent movies. Then the medicine men would come once in a while. You know those medicine men shows? They'd come and put acts, and they'd sell these tonics and all these remedies that cure everything. They were quite entertaining, though.

FR: Did they draw a good crowd?

MM: They did. A full house.

FR: Did they sell much of their medicine?

MM: I think they did. Yeah. And the movie – the silent movie – we all would look forward to the piano player because she played the sounds. It was really awful when she didn't come if she couldn't come.

FR: Do you remember any of the movies?

MM: Oh, [inaudible], Mary Pickford, some of those old Westerns. [laughter] They were nice, we thought. Now you look at them, and you don't see how you enjoyed it. [laughter]

FR: How did you meet your husband?

MM: Well, I've always known him. He didn't live too far. It was after we got through school I met him. Since I knew him all the time, I didn't exactly know when I did meet him.

FR: What did you do on dates? Where would you go?

MM: We'd probably go down to the shanty for an ice cream in the summer. And in the winter, we'd be home; we'd play games or go to his parents or my parents. That's all. There was no way of transportation to go. Even in those days, it would cost eight dollars to go to Hyannis and back. The (scutters?) would run a taxi. You can't afford that very often.

FR: Yeah, that's rather expensive.

MM: It was very expensive. As I say, cars and gas, compared to today, even were more [expensive]. Compared to the wages we made, I think they're very expensive. Not many people had cars.

FR: You mentioned people coming around, selling goods. Do you remember anybody else that traveled around?

MM: The grand union tea company. They came once a month. They had [inaudible], and then there was a man who [inaudible] Isaacson. He came. He had quite nice clothes, better, I think, than the other. He came later. But Mrs. [inaudible] was a great help to them people because they couldn't get out any other way.

FR: Was there anybody else?

MM: Well, the Isaacsons from Falmouth. Yeah. He said that he started off with – when he came to this country – his brother gave him two dollars, and he said by the end of the week, he should have four dollars, and then he did. And after that, you're on your own. That's how he started.

FR: Did he give him the two dollars back?

MM: I don't know about that, but he said you're on your own. He says we'll help you three times. If you fail, they don't bother with you anymore. But he made good.

FR: What was his name?

MM: Isaac (Coin?). He was a nice old man. He had his pack and sold shoestrings and socks.

FR: Was he very successful?

MM: Yes. He became very wealthy. He loaned the money later to a [inaudible] family that lives here, next to me. He used to stay there when he'd come around, two, three days, you know. He'd travel to town. And I know that when they found him in, I think, Buzzards Bay or Sagamore, he had some kind of a spell, and his brother took over. And I guess he discovered then that he had lots of money, that he foreclosed on these people; they would pay, and they were surprised how much money he had made.

FR: Do you recall the Main Street in Cotuit?

MM: Oh, yes.

FR: What was it like?

MM: Well, this Main Street was always kind of the heart – but it wasn't as nice, you know, as it is now, of course. But the one – Falmouth Avenue, that was dirt. I don't remember the year it was tarred, but [inaudible]

FR: Do you remember the businesses that were there? The stores?

MM: There wasn't any. Well, Mr. Lapham's store, Elmer Lapham, is off here on Main Street.

FR: That was the only store.

MM: That was the only store. And then, down in Cotuit, there was what they called the (Fred Parker?) store, the grocery store. And there was a little jewelry store. And then Sears department store, which was a very nice one. They had about everything from dishes to nails to – a very nice store, which now they turned into – what is it now? – it's a park now.

FR: The school? Was that on Main Street?

MM: The school was up – well, across School Street, just on that – above that. What did they call that street? School Street.

FR: Where the church is.

MM: Where the church is. Right across [from the] church. Where the post office is today.

FR: How did you refrigerate your food?

MM: Well, we had the old icebox, and then sometimes you'd even run out of ice, and you'd have to eat whatever you cooked. You'd eat it because you're scared to keep it the next day. And then sometimes people would put milk near the pipe of the well, the pump, way down in the basement, and that would keep it from getting

bad – and the butter. You put the milk and butter. But other things, you would just eat. Just get enough to eat it right away so it wouldn't spoil. I didn't think it was that sanitary. They had a grocery store, and the crackers were in a big twenty-five-pound box and cheese was in a large hunk, and prunes were in a big box. And then you'd go there, get a pound of prunes, maybe a pound of crackers, and a piece of cheese. The same man would cut everything for you.

FR: He handled kerosene?

MM: And then somebody would come in and get kerosene, and he'd fill that for them and then molasses. I don't think it's very sanitary.

FR: You told me about a molasses story about your father.

MM: Yeah, the spring, after the winter, the [inaudible] sugar comes down on the barrel, and they buy those barrels. Anybody that wanted them.

FR: Buy it from whom?

MM: They'd buy them from the grocery man for fifty cents, barrel and all. And my father would split the barrel in half, and he'd use that for water for the animals. And the other half, there was a lot of molasses with the sugar – hard sugar. And mother would take it out and put in [inaudible] down in the cellar, and she'd use that for cookies and lots of things – cooking. And then they'd also use the other half of the barrel for a washtub. Some of them made their washtubs out of broomsticks or sticks. I don't know if you ever saw one.

FR: No. What was it like?

MM: Well, I don't know. Made a frame, and then they put these like broom handles, nail it together, and that would make a scrub board, instead of buying one.

FR: Tell me, what were the holidays like?

MM: Well, they weren't really – [inaudible] many holidays. Memorial Day, people would – there'd always be parades at the different, and they'd go to them. And then Fourth of July, there would be something. And then – I don't know – people would picnic and just have a quiet – they seemed to have an awfully nice time about it.

FR: How did you celebrate Christmas?

MM: Oh, Christmas was the old-fashioned way. They'd sing carols, and we didn't have presents. My people didn't celebrate Christmas that way. It was just an open house and a lot to eat. And that's the way you'd celebrate. But no presents. I remember the first time I went to – we had Sunday school. Mr. [inaudible] asked my grandmother if he could use her house for Sunday school for us few people here, and he did. And the first Christmas tree – well, our people never had seen a Christmas tree before. That wasn't their way of celebrating. And presents. So that was a great, great thing to have. And Mr. Sears, Mr. Benjamin Sears, he was Santa Claus, and he gave out the presents. It was a great day. And from then on. But that was the first time. I don't know. I must have been ten years old.

FR: How was the tree decorated?

MM: Oh, mostly homemade things. We made them out of different things. And then they'd sell them in-store, too. Mostly combs. Pretty paper wrapped up in – and they'd fill those cones with candy. And there would be ribbons. It wasn't like it is today, but we thought it was wonderful. And popcorn – they'd string popcorn and cranberries. They would decorate that way.

FR: Your people, the Portuguese – [inaudible] very happy people.

MM: Oh, very happy people.

FR: Tell me something about them.

MM: Well, I really don't know what to tell you.

FR: They enjoyed the country?

MM: They loved the country. They thought it was great.

FR: Tell me about driving to West Barnstable in a horse and buggy when you were growing up.

MM: Yeah. We had a horse and buggy, and our father would let us drive. Sometimes he said the horse would know the way, especially when we went to West Barnstable. We'd pull the rein [inaudible], then the horse would go, and we'd go [inaudible] store, and then that was right near the station. And also we'd

drive to [inaudible] and [inaudible] and East Bay Lodge, and another boarding place; I forget now the name.

FR: You used to go to West Barnstable for the train?

MM: For the train. Yes. With passengers. Yeah.

FR: Bring them over here to Cotuit?

MM: Yeah. And everybody that landed that didn't know how to speak or didn't know where to go, they'd always refer to my father's house. Many a time, he put up people that – mother said one time they divided upstairs with blankets and things until the people found a way to go. [laughter]

FR: Tell me, do you remember the Depression?

MM: Yes, I do. Because it was – I was already married.

FR: Was it difficult?

MM: It was difficult. Yes. But my husband seemed to always find work. He'd paint, or he'd work around bogs. He was well-known. But he did work for the WPA [Works Progress Administration] for about three months that winter. That was a severe winter, and it was 1936. And a lot of us did. Even [inaudible] from Osterville.

FR: Were there many people on welfare?

MM: I didn't think so, but I didn't know about them. But the WPA – I suppose – I don't was considered welfare. But a lot of people were entitled to get food and things, but we never did. Well, they worked, and they opened up roads, and they – I thought it was a good thing then.

FR: Would the grocery extend you credit?

MM: Yes, they did, in those days. Yeah.

FR: During the winter?

MM: Any time, I guess. Especially here, at Cotuit. And lots of people depend on it quite a lot.

FR: Do you remember the first automobile?

MM: Yes, I do. Doctor Higgins, old Doctor Higgins – first automobile I had a ride in and first one I really saw. I don't think hardly anybody had an automobile.

FR: What kind of man was Dr. Higgins?

MM: He was a wonderful person. Yeah. So was his son. He was a family man. He always left you with a story that you'd laugh. He's wonderful.

FR: What kind of hours did he work?

MM: Any hour. All hours. You call the doctor, and his car would just come running up and – just quick service. He was a wonderful person that way.

FR: What did he charge you?

MM: Gee, I think it was – at first, it was a dollar-fifty and then went up to two dollars. A dollar-fifty. And then, if your sickness was long, after the bill, he'd take off a few dollars. And then some people would pay also in things. But he, himself, was a farmer as a hobby. He had a wonderful garden. He knew what it was to –

FR: Do you recall World War I?

MM: Oh, yes, definitely. My husband [inaudible] young man. Yeah. People were very patriotic in them days. But it was kind of an awful thing to go through. I recall World War II because my son was in that, too. They left out of the same platform out of Hyannis.

FR: Tell me about freezing a cow or pig.

MM: Yeah. Mostly a cow. We didn't freeze the pig. They'd smoke it – bacon, ham, and they'd do that. But the cow, they'd buy [inaudible] either half or a quarter, whatever they could afford. Hang it in the corn house, and then they'd saw it up as they needed it.

FR: Do you remember the first telephone?

MM: Not too well. It seems it didn't make an impression. But I always knew there was a telephone in town. Mr. Pinkham had one. So it didn't impress me too much when they did come. I don't know what year it was.

FR: Do you remember the first time you had indoor plumbing?

MM: Oh, yes. Of course, that, too, I don't remember the date, but that was quite a luxury. Yeah.

FR: Electricity?

MM: Electricity, yes. Yeah.

FR: Do you recall getting that?

MM: I do, yes. Wonderful. Well, I certainly have enjoyed the Cape a lot because I was born here, and I love it. I don't even care to travel anywhere else. I think it's just grand.

FR: Thank you, Mrs. Madeiros. Thank you very much.

MM: Yeah, you're welcome. You're welcome.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Molly Graham 10/3/2022