



# NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

Date of Interview: June 13, 2024

Name of Narrator: Silvino “Sal” Sequeira

Name of Interviewer: Eldric R. Abreu

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Sequeira, Silvino. Interview by Eldric R. Abreu. *Casting a Wider Net*. New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center. 06/13/2024:

This oral history was produced in 2024 as part of the *Casting a Wider Net Oral History Project* conducted by New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center.

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**Background Information:**

- **Name of person interviewed:** Silvino “Sal” Sequeira
- **Age:** 56
- **Gender:** Male
- **Occupation:** Industrial Welder at Blue Fleet Welding
- **Ethnicity:** Cape Verdean

**Interviewer:** Eldric R. Abreu

**Translator:** Eldric R. Abreu

**Observer(s):** Laura Orleans

**Transcriber:** Eldric R. Abreu

**Interview location:** New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center, 38 Bethel St., New Bedford, MA

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**Language(s) the interview was conducted in:** Kriolu

**Key Words:** welding, dredge, scallop, Submerged Arc Welding, Blue Fleet Welding, New Bedford, Praia, Santiago, Cape Verde, Portugal, immigration, poverty, English, Creole, Portuguese, language barriers, language learning, New Bedford High School, hanger, offshore wind industry, commercial fishing industry, regulations, epilepsy, CV Time, stereotypes

**Abstract:** In this interview, Silvina “Sal” Sequeira speaks about immigrating from Cape Verde to Portugal as a child with his family and then from Portugal to the United States with his wife as an adult. He discusses his luck in having the opportunity to learn how to weld, which helped him obtain the job he has held as an industrial welder for 27 years at Blue Fleet Welding in New Bedford, MA. He talks about how physically demanding his job is, but also notes that he relishes the challenges and is happiest when his work requires a variety of skills and knowledge.

**Notes:**

## **Index**

[00:00] Sal introduces himself and his job as an industrial welder; explains where he was born, emigration to Portugal where his parents tried to give their children a better life, and how he ended up in New Bedford as an adult.

[05:15] Sal explains how he quickly found work in a factory where he learned Submerged Arc Welding and then asked a friend who was working on the owner of Blue Fleet Welding's car if they were hiring. Because he could demonstrate his capabilities with welding, despite his lack of English, he was hired and has been working at Blue Fleet for the past 27 years. Sal explains his hard work ethic and preference for challenging work and expands upon the physical effort required to making metal dredges for commercial fishing. Sal describes how he attained his high school diploma and improved his English by attending night school at New Bedford High School.

[10:45] Sal describes the small model dredge he made for the NB Fishing Heritage Center and explains the size of the dredges he usually works on is 15 feet. He talks about making wooden doors and why they don't usually make metal doors, although they will repair them. Sal talks about the number and ethnicity of the other employees at Blue Fleet Welding.

[16:16] Sal describes the challenges of working both in the Winter and the Summer. He also describes the technique he uses when working on boats that are still in the water—including having to use hangers to shift the boat so they can work below the water line.

[21:05] Sal explains that he would recommend this job to others, but notes that it is a lot of work and that you must continue to learn new skills in order to remain competitive and take on larger, higher paying jobs in the field. He describes his work schedule and emphasizes the need to understand safety precautions on the job. He describes how the amount of fulltime work available for welders working on commercial fishing vessels has decreased overtime which he attributes to the regulations affecting commercial fishermen. He explains that Blue Fleet Welding is not able to compensate for that decline in work by supplementing with work for the new offshore wind industry because many of the supplies needed to do those repairs are not available locally.

[27:15] Sal discusses his connections to other Cape Verdeans in New Bedford, his frustration with some of the stereotypes about Cape Verdean culture, in particular CV Time, and the lack of opportunities to celebrate Cape Verdean culture in New Bedford.

### **Part 2**

[00:00-3:35]

Eldric discuss how he would slip into Creole when he experienced epilepsy and Sal and Eldric commiserate about how they learned multiple languages and taught them to teach them to their children.

## **Full Transcript**

**[00:00-05:10]**

Eldric Abreu: Let's begin. My name is Eldric Abreu. Today is the 13th of June, 2024, and I am here with Silvino Sequeira, also known as "Sal." In this interview, I will begin by asking you some questions regarding your career journey, personal life, and family. Additionally, I'm interested in learning about your Cape Verdean culture and whether your cultural background has had any influence on your line of work. This interview is part of the New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center's Casting a Wider Net project. The audio recording and transcript from this interview will become part of the Center's archive and the NOAA VOICES archive and may be used to develop future programs, publications, and exhibits. Since you have already mentioned your name, I will start by asking you what you do for work.

Silvino Sequeira: I am an industrial welder at Blue Fleet Welding, where we focus on metal fabrication of scallop dredges, parts for boats, crane services, and boat repairs.

EA: Where were you born?

SS: I was born in Cape Verde, in Praia, Santiago.

EA: How long have you been living here in America?

SS: I have been living here for about 26 years now. My parents were born in Cape Verde as well, but they moved to Portugal, and I lived in Portugal for some years.

EA: Yeah, I hear a lot of Cape Verdeans move to Portugal for opportunities for work, education, and visas. My uncle is a professor in Cape Verde on the island of Sal, and he tells me that many of his students, after they graduate, end up going to Portugal to further their education in college. What brought you and your family here to New Bedford?

SS: Well, out of the majority of my family, it is just me here; my family stayed in Cape Verde. When I was in Portugal, I met my spouse there. Later, we got married, and she told me that most of her family lived here in New Bedford. After living a few years in Portugal, we decided to move to the United States.

EA: Oh, interesting! So your wife, whom you met in Portugal, has family and connections here in New Bedford. What a small world. I find it interesting that when I visit Florida, I hardly ever meet a person who knows what or where New Bedford is. But when I visit Cabo Verde, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, I hardly find a person who hasn't heard of New Bedford.

SS: (Laughs) That is funny but true.

EA: Tell me a little bit about your family and your culture.

SS: We are a poor family. My father went to Portugal two times before we did as a family. He spent four years in Portugal before he was able to afford to bring over all six of his family members, which included my mother, myself, my three brothers, and my two sisters. Our mother and father tried to give us a life that we never had before. It was especially difficult for immigrants in Portugal, but they were able to provide us with a decent life and environment. We appreciated all the help, and after we all became adults, we separated, with every sibling going their own way, following their dreams of a better life. I have a brother in France, a brother in Switzerland, and a brother and sister who stayed in Portugal, and I am the only one of my siblings that came to the United States.

EA: Oh, that's interesting! It sounds like you have family all over the world then.

SS: Yeah, actually, I do. In Cape Verde, the closest family I can think of living there are some uncles and cousins.

**[05:15-10:35]**

EA: Since you have been here in the United States, have you felt there are advantages or more opportunities here than where you have lived previously?

SS: Yes, it has. Coming to live in the United States is not easy. It depends on what you are looking for and what you are willing to do. Everywhere you go, this is something you must face. I got lucky when I first arrived here; I was able to get a factory job quickly in the north end, and I was there for about two days. Then, I was given a chance to learn and work with Submerged Arc Welding (SAW), a common arc welding process.

EA: Wait, the factory you are talking about is still open? Because there is this abandoned factory on Nash Rd named Chamberlain Manufacturing Co. that my uncle told me was his first job when he came to America. There is another large factory that is still open named Titleist.

SS: I am not too sure; I cannot remember the name, but I am pretty sure the company is still open, just not as busy with work, and yes, it is near the Titleist factory in the north end of New Bedford.

EA: What led you from the SAW welding job you were doing to your current workplace and role?

SS: Actually, the owner of Blue Fleet Welding owns a few garages—about three of them—and a friend of mine was working on the Blue Fleet company owner's car the day that I was there. I asked my friend if he could speak with Paul, the owner, for me to see if Blue Fleet was hiring or looking for employees, that I had some experience using SAW welding. He responded for me to come by tomorrow. I had no issue working with SAW welding; my issue was communication. I couldn't speak much English. I went the next

day to do some training and show my experience, and the following day he told me I was hired and could begin working and have been there ever since.

EA: Seems like you impressed him on your first day of training and he knew you were a hard-working employee.

SS: Exactly, my work ethic was essential. After that, I began night school at New Bedford High School for three years, where my English grew stronger, and I was able to receive my high school diploma, which became very helpful for my future.

EA: Sounds like things only got better after you started working here. How long have you been working at Blue Fleet Welding now?

SS: Around 27 years now. This was the first job I started here, and it will be my last.

EA: I am 28 years old, so you have been an employee here almost my whole life (laughing). You must love the work you do then.

SS: Yes, I love the work I do!

EA: What are some challenges or difficulties you face in your workplace?

SS: Well, I do not like doing the same thing over and over again. I don't like being stuck inside my workplace. Sometimes we have different measurements, but overall, we do the same old things. I prefer working on the boat. There are a lot more different jobs and tasks needed. You always have to be thinking about what you do and thinking about your work one step ahead; that is the challenge at work.

EA: Yeah, plenty of times I've told people one thing I enjoy about a busy day is that it helps the time go by quicker, and I feel like I have accomplished a lot.

SS: Yeah, I like to challenge myself.

EA: Tell me a little bit about the loading process or the process of making the metal dredges?

SS: The process of making the metal dredges is very interesting. It takes a lot of physical effort for us, and it is really hot due to the welding. When you see the large dredges completed, you would think they were made by some large machines, but they are not; they are made by the hard physical work of the employees. There will be still rods that we need to heat up and bend on each side. It gets really hot, especially when you have the protective gear on your face, and it's in a really hot environment. But if you enjoy doing it, it won't bother you. They don't do this work, and that we're doing more work. But I enjoy it. It takes a lot of physical force. Sometimes people ask me all the time, "Hey, do you go to the gym?" I'm like, "Yeah, my gym is every day when I'm at work."

EA: Yeah, that's true. I put on some weight working in an office while on the computer instead of doing physical labor. When you work a job that requires a lot of physical labor, staying in shape and working out every day during your work shift is important."

**[10:40 -16:16]**

EA: Yeah, like I seen the smaller metal dredge that you had made for the New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center and was very impressed a lot of work and a lot of effort.

SS: Yeah, that's, [compared to] the other ones that we make at work, considered a baby dredge (Laughing out loud).

EA: But even looking at the smaller dredge and its details, you could tell that it took a lot of work.

SS: Yeah, but that was a small one. I don't even remember the size of that dredge.

EA: How big are the large ones that you make at work?

SS: The ones that we make up work are all about 15 feet.

EA: Oh wow, that's a large piece of work, especially compared to the one I saw in the museum, you can tell those commercial size ships must need some metal dredges.

SS: Yeah, they are pretty big.

EA: Outside of your work with welding and making the dredges, what else do you make at work or what other things?

SS: Another thing that I do here is make doors for the boats. We used to make wooden doors more often, which I learned to do from an old friend. Nowadays, boats usually have doors made of metal, but we don't make the metal doors, even though we could. We work on the repairs of the metal doors because it would be a lot more expensive and time-consuming for us to make a full metal door. There are machines and companies that fabricate them at a cheaper price. In these commercial companies, as long as you have the correct measurements—20 or 30 options—if we were to make one, the boat owners would have to wait for us to produce each individual door. So, it's easier for them to just buy the metal door somewhere else. Three months ago, I made two doors that were 8 x 4 feet. Around here, our company is usually the only one that makes wooden doors; it's not often that you find people who still work on them or receive orders for wooden ones.

EA: Do you have any family or friends who work in this type of job?

SS: Yes, I have friends here at work. There are about six employees here: two primarily work on the dredges, another two make nets for them, and the last two—the ones including me and a friend of mine—typically work on the boats. First, we analyze what

work needs to be done on the boats. If it's something I can do right away, I will do it. If it's something harder, I'll get some other coworkers and bring them to the issues while I check what other tasks need to be done, so I am usually going back and forth among all of the tasks around the workplace.

EA: So you're like a supervisor going around doing a little bit of everything. With over 20 years of experience, you must be a pro!

SS: Well, I do have experience in all of those fields, so I try to help all of my coworkers and get the harder work done first.

EA: Considering the historical marine industry in New Bedford, our diverse community has played a large part. In your workplace, are there a lot of employees who are Portuguese, Spanish, or Cape Verdean? Or is it just diverse all around?

SS: Actually, I am the only Cape Verdean who works here. We have had a few Cape Verdean employees who came from Cape Verde and asked me if I could help them get a job here and if they could start immediately. I have to tell them I'm not the boss of the company and can't do the hiring, but I could put in a word for them. A few times, I've gotten back to them letting them know there has been an opening opportunity. They tell me, "Oh, thanks, but I'm already working a different job," so I haven't had a chance to work with many Cape Verdeans here, actually. We do have a lot of Spanish employees, including Guatemalans and Dominicans, as well as two American employees.

EA: That's funny! When I speak Spanish, people usually tell me that I sound like a Dominican, but I say I'm speaking well.

SS: LOL! Yeah, we do have a lot of diverse cultures in the workplace, and we get along really well. It's a very friendly environment. They are all great people!

EA: Actually, I tell a lot of people that after speaking Creole, I find speaking Spanish a lot more natural than speaking Portuguese. A lot of people find that shocking since I am Cape Verdean. But I believe it's because, in Cape Verde, Portuguese is the language taught in school. Growing up in New Bedford, I was raised around a lot of Spanish people, and my first job was working with a Spanish crew, which helped with pronunciation and strengthened the knowledge I already had of Spanish. It was a moving job, and both of my crew members were Guatemalan and spoke predominantly Spanish. One of the crew members told me he could understand some things when I spoke my Cape Verdean Creole and that I spoke good Spanish, but could just use some help with the pronunciations. So, we decided I would only speak to them in Spanish, and anytime I said something incorrectly, they would correct me, and I had to teach them the same sentence in Cape Verdean Creole. After a few months of working together, I was able to strengthen my Spanish and teach two Spanish men Cape Verdean Creole, which they picked up quickly. It was easier than expected and extremely helpful for all of us. Cape Verdean Creole is a mixture of Portuguese and Spanish (Cape Verdean Creole is a mixture of Portuguese and indigenous African languages, but because Portuguese and Spanish are both romance languages there is some overlap), but I hear a



lot more of the Latin root in it because it has helped me understand other languages such as French and Italian.

**[16:16-21:00]**

EA: What kind of tools do you use in your workplace or while you're working? Is it worse with the heat in the summer?

SS: In the summer—and actually in the winter as well—we usually work outside due to working with fire and the sparks flying. It's not the fire that is the issue because the heat around the flame is the same in both winter and summer. One issue that can happen in the summer is that if a piece we are welding or working on falls on the floor, it's a lot more difficult to pick up than in the winter due to the already warm weather. The ground is extra hot from the sun every day, which can make it really difficult to pick something up that we usually would be able to handle with our welding gloves in the winter. In the winter, the weather is so cold, but the heat is blowing at you, and you begin to sweat and never fully dry, which causes your skin to become dry. Sometimes you ask yourself which season is better to work in, summer or winter, but there's no clear answer. In the winter, the heat will make you sweat, and you're going to need to change your shirt multiple times a day. The same goes for the heat in the summer, so it doesn't really make much of a difference.

EA: Yes, that's one thing I remember from when I worked in labor—working outside in the winter can really be uncomfortable because sweating in cold weather leaves you with a damp shirt and being in cold weather with a wet shirt while sweating is terrible for your health and body.

SS: Yeah, exactly. I have been asked whether I prefer working in the winter or the summer, and I said, you know, there's not really a difference for both seasons. In the summer, I have to change my shirt multiple times because I'm sweating, but it's the same in the winter due to the work in the hot temperature. It's like everything in life—there are ups and downs.

EA: So, when you're working on the boats, are they usually stopped and docked at the pier?

SS: Normally, it depends on the type of work. If it's inside the boat, yes, it will usually be stopped and docked. But if it's work done outside the boat, sometimes we use smaller raft boats to work on the exterior. Sometimes the problem is underwater, and we have to put more weight on one side of the boat to help shift it over so we can work on that side. A lot of times, we use tools from the boats called hangers that help shift pressure from one side of a boat to another. Sometimes we're also working with cranes or lifts, depending on the location outside of the boat, how high it is, and how big the boat is.

EA: A lot less interestingly, I was interviewing a male coworker, and he was telling me about working on the boats using the cranes. I was like, "Oh wow, there's a lot more

work that goes into this," and I was really intrigued to find out how much work you do right on the water.

SS: Actually, a lot of the work is done right on the water because to take a boat out of the water, the owner has to pay a lot just to get the boat out and delivered to our company. This makes the cost of the job much more expensive, so people usually prefer to do the work while the boats are in the water instead of taking them out.

EA: Yeah, that makes sense. It would probably be easier for both the owner and the repair crew, but a lot more expensive.

SS: For us, it's a lot easier to work on the boat when it's out of the water. We have a lot more tools at our company that we can bring onto the water, and there's a lot less risk than working on the water itself—especially when the waves are shaking everything, particularly when you use tools. That's why your skills need to come into play when doing repairs on a shaky surface, but I like the challenge.

EA: Wow, yeah, that is really impressive. You know, they say there are some jobs that are not meant for everybody due to the challenges.

SS: Yeah, it's a lot easier when you're doing work that you enjoy.

EA: Definitely, you're an artist with the work that you do on the boats.

SS: Thank you very much.

**[21:05-27:00]**

EA: If you had a chance, would you recommend this field of work to other people?

SS: Yeah, I would love to. I would just remind them that it's a lot of work. You need to make sure you know what you're doing. Right now, people who are making a lot of money are the ones who have skills; not everybody can bring that to the table. Believe me, if I had the skills to make about \$20,000 a month, I would too. But not everyone has the experiences and passions that align with that pay scale, so the only thing you can do is follow your passion so you can learn and continue to grow. Everybody has their own skill set, and people who want to continue to learn—that's what I recommend. I have experience, and I feel that what I did was essential. I didn't know all these electrical tools when I first started, but I continued to learn, which helped me grow into larger roles and take on more responsibilities at my workplace, like different types of jobs. That's a big difference when working in various positions. I might say, "Yeah, I have experience with welding," but then you're asked, "Do you have experience working with these large commercial welding machines? Have you ever worked with large tools?" If so, you need to train and build on the experience you have to continue adding more.

EA: Yes, that makes sense. And of course, with your line of work, for safety reasons, you must know the exact processes before you go into work.

SS: You should know all of this before you even touch any of the machines. We make sure you understand safety precautions, different ways to work, different types of tools, and various scenarios before you practice or start training hands-on with these machines. You must always keep your workspace clean, test the tools before you use them, and ensure that people follow these precautionary measures in their everyday work.

EA: Yeah, that's true. I tell a lot of people, especially my age, that one thing I've learned from working with older people is that you can learn the basics before starting a job. However, having experience in that field can prepare you for challenges and difficulties that you won't find in a book or won't know until you experience them. That knowledge is key; learning from other people's mistakes so you can avoid them is invaluable.

SS: Yeah, it's the same every day in my workplace. Every time we try something new, I learn something new, whether it's something that helps in the work.

EA: How long is the average workday for you? About eight hours?

SS: No, I like to arrive early so I can sign in and check out what the work tasks are for the day, and help set up the crews. But normally, an average workday for me is about 10 hours. However, it could range from 8 to 12 hours, depending on how early I get there and how much work there is to do; it can vary.

EA: How many days a week do you usually work?

SS: Usually, I work a five-day week, but at times I will be working on Saturdays if there is extra work or if I want to put in more hours that week. It benefits us all: the company makes more money, I make more money, and I can give extra hours when they are needed.

EA: Since you've started working in your job, have you noticed any differences? I hear a lot of people in the community, especially fishermen, mentioning some changes since the offshore wind industry has come into New Bedford.

SS: One big change I've seen since I moved to America is the availability of work. When I first came here, if you wanted to work, you could have the opportunity to work 40 to 80 hours a week if you could handle it. But now, it can be difficult to get a full 40-hour week. Not all of our employees can even get a full 40 hours sometimes due to the lack of work.

EA: Also, you've seen a decrease in the amount of work, right?

SS: Not only is there less work, but there are a lot more time restrictions in the fishing industry that affect all of us who work around the marine industry, especially since a lot of our customers are commercial fishing boats. The less work they're doing, or the less

time they spend out on the water, means fewer repairs they need, which ultimately affects us all.

EA: It sounds like you've noticed a big difference in the workload in the marine industry since you started.

SS: Definitely, there's a big difference in the amount of work and workload that was available compared to now.

EA: What about the boats or vessels from the offshore wind industry? Have they brought in more work, or do you work with them?

SS: We don't work with them; we mainly work with commercial fishing boats, and that's it.

EA: Oh, well, I work at NBOC, a nonprofit focused on different aspects of the marine industry, promoting opportunities for people with experience in commercial fishing to gain work and creating opportunities for them to work on boats in the offshore wind industry. One of my roles is to do outreach with local companies, just in case an offshore wind developer needs a local company. I can recommend Blue Fleet Welding for experience in repairs on boats.

SS: Actually, there was one time they asked us to come work on a piece, but we were unable to get the supplies we needed, and the contract was never completed.

EA: Yeah, a lot of the supplies in this new industry are coming from foreign areas that have the experience since the offshore wind industry is new in the US.

SS: Yeah, exactly. I remember my boss and I went to meet with those developers, and we told them that we were looking online for those pieces but couldn't find them anywhere near us to complete the repairs. That was one of the biggest issues.

**[27:15 - 32:47]**

EA: Well, we're nearing the end. Thank you so much for your answers. Is there anything more you would like to share about your story?

SS: I can't really think of anything else. I think we've pretty much discussed everything. Just like I said, since I moved here to the United States, I've been in New Bedford, and I've never had a problem here. I enjoy living here. I've heard a lot of people say, "Oh, New Bedford isn't the best place. It can be a violent area." But I tell everyone that there's violence everywhere you go. That's only the negative that they focus on. I would say that living in New Bedford has helped me in a very difficult world. My son lives here and works here, and so does my wife. Her family enjoys it, and I've never had an issue living here.

EA: Oh, that's interesting! You have a son who lives here. Is there any family?

SS: Yes, I do have a son who lives here and two daughters. His name is Geovanny.

SS: Oh wow, Geovanny Sequeira! I've worked a lot with him here in the city, and we went to school together, actually.

Laura: Oh, you know his son?

EA: Yeah, actually, you might know him too. Gio works with Marci Pina[-Christian] in Human Relations.

Laura: I'm not sure, but maybe Emma does.

EA: Maybe by face.

EA: It's funny; I always say that Cape Verdeans are like one big family, even if we're not related. We either are family or we know each other.

SS: That's the truth; it really is. Do you live in New Bedford too?

EA: Yeah, I was born here. My dad came from Senegal when he was about 18 years old, and my mother came to New Bedford when she was about 21. They have been here since. My mom works a lot in the community.

SS: Who is your mom?

EA: Dina.

SS: Dina from Sal?

EA: Yeah, well, that's where I got my height from—my mother. My dad's a little shorter; I got my height from my mother.

SS: Oh wow, I remember you when you were a little baby boy!

EA: Wow, that's so funny! One of the other interviewees I spoke to was Francisco.

SS: Oh yeah, I know Francisco.

EA: That's funny because he said, "Oh wow, look at Eldric! I've known you since you were a little baby boy."

SS: That's funny! I have baby pictures of you!

EA: Wow, what a small world! This is part of my passion for working in my community. One thing I love about this project is that they're recording in Cape Verdean Creole to help share stories with people in their native tongue, especially in a city that is

historically known for its ties to Cape Verdean culture, but you don't see much of that culture here.

SS: Yes, Cape Verdeans love celebrating our culture at home, but you don't see it much in this community. You know, people will sit there and never show up to attend. There's not much celebrating or embracing of our culture. We all want that, but nobody has made a big enough effort to embrace it in this city, and that's something New Bedford needs.

EA: Yeah, that's what I've been saying. We need more diverse representation from our culture. One thing I would love to do is get my foot in the door and be able to represent my community and culture. I joke around with my mom all the time, saying that I embrace everything about our culture, except showing up on Cape Verdean time. If I'm doing an event for Cape Verdeans and it starts at 3:30, I'll tell them 2:30 because I know they're still going to be late for 3:30.

SS: That's one thing I do not like—showing up late. I say, “Yes, I am a Cape Verdean,” but that has nothing to do with my timing. If I say a certain time, that's the time I mean.

EA: Yeah, my mom says that all the time. She's like, “No, that's not a stereotype I live up to.” That might be something I can say about your generation—you love to show up late! But one thing I taught my family is not to show up late or keep people waiting.

SS: Yeah, that's not something I like either. I make sure I raise my son to be considerate of time. When my children were young, I used to take them to CCD at the Cape Verdean church in the South.

EA: Oh, Our Lady of Assumption?

SS: Yes, exactly. I would make sure that whenever we would arrive, it would be 10 minutes early. If anybody asked me for a ride and kept me waiting more than five minutes, I would leave because I wasn't going to show up late because of them. I made sure I taught my children the same way. I told my kids, “Two minutes”—and they knew that meant they better be ready by the end of that two minutes! But my wife will say two minutes and she'll make it like 20 minutes!

EA: I remember that when I was younger; my mom would say she'd be ready in five minutes or two minutes, and I'd be like, “Hey, where are your shoes? Where's your backpack? You should be dressed already.” And I was like, “How are you saying five minutes? It's not even three minutes!” She was like, “Well, you should already be dressed and ready.” I tell people I don't have that tardiness because it's something I was instilled with in my childhood by my mother.

EA: Thank you for this wonderful interview. It was a pleasure.

SS: It was my pleasure and a great experience. You're welcome!

[00:00 - 03:35] PART 2 of the recording

EA: I was going to say, actually, one funny thing was when I started developing my epilepsy in college.

Laura: Epilepsy ain't no joke!

EA: I know—had to learn it the hard way. But thankfully, for this last year, it has been a lot more controlled. When I first started having my seizure breakouts, one of my close friends from college was telling me that when it first happened, I would have little blackouts. We were just speaking in English, and then I started speaking Creole. And then I would ask him, “What are you talking about? Are you tired or are you drunk or something?” Because I wouldn’t remember any of it, and I would be postictal for a little while. The whole time, I thought I was speaking English.

SS: That happens sometimes; it does.

EA: And the more it started happening and becoming more frequent, the people who were around me and witnessed it would tell me that while I was having my seizure, I would be speaking Creole. I realized that during my seizures or my postictal state, I usually revert to my natural instincts or first behaviors. Then I began to wonder if I had learned Creole as my first language. So, I asked my mom, “Did I learn Creole first or English?” She responded, “Why would I teach you English first if you’re going to learn that in school? I want you to be able to speak in your native tongue as well.” Then I realized that was the connection I had with my seizures, and that was the first language I was taught. I found it interesting. I was usually speaking English at that time, especially in college, and then I would randomly start speaking Creole. I was able to make the connection, and that’s one thing I really love about growing up in New Bedford: it has helped me work with different cultures, learn my Portuguese, and learn my Spanish. Part of that has helped me speak Spanish fluently. I actually tell my first-generation Cape Verdean cousins that my Spanish is better than their Portuguese. It’s like I didn’t go to school to learn Portuguese; when I speak Portuguese, some people tell me my Portuguese sounds Brazilian. But Spanish? Growing up around a lot of Spanish people helped polish my Spanish because I learned it in high school, and I stayed on top of it. Portuguese helped me learn my Spanish. When I told my mom about it, I was amazed!

Laura: If you use it, it stays fresh.

EA: Exactly! And you really stay on top of it. I’m glad my mother introduced it to me, but it’s something I want to pass on to my children.

Laura: Do your children speak Creole?

SS: Yes, they do. They speak Creole and a little bit of Spanish and Portuguese. My wife speaks with them a lot in Portuguese.

EA: My mother's partner is Brazilian, and when we speak, he says, "Oh, I love your Portuguese!" I love your Portuguese! Usually, it's the other way around when I'm just thinking about someone speaking with someone from Portugal.