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From Immigrant to Ethnic: Interview with Leiberato DaMota by Joseph Conforti

Leiberato DaMota

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Rhode Island College

ETHNIC STUDIES PROJECT

Oral History Interview # 6

with

Leiberato DaMota

April 15, 1976

By Joseph Conforti

Tape 1 Side 1

- 7 Born on a farm in the Azores. Father was well-off. They had a happy life. He moved to the village after graduation and worked as a professional photographer.
- 18 Left Azores in 1957 because he became involved in political difficulties.
- 34 Left Portugal and came to British Columbia.
- 46 Description of farm in Azores.
- 68 When he arrived in British Columbia he worked for 6 months on a fruit farm--found it very hard work. Had never worked on his father's farm at home. He was the only son and was spoiled. Workers were hired help.
- 83 Was married for 5½ years and then had to leave the country. He was very confused for several months when he arrived in Canada. He knew no English, he had no friends there.
- 107 Left British Columbia after 6 months and went to Toronto. Stayed with friends while looking for work, which was difficult to find. Eventually worked as caretaker for Newman Center and was provided with room and board. Enjoyed involvement with university students. Worked there for 8½ years.
- 144 Was born in San Miguel in the Azores. Left when 29. Description of life there. Most people were farmers. Farm was in his family for a long time. His family was one of the oldest in the area.
- 180 Schooling: high school was in another town and he was not able to attend.
- 190 Entertainment: movies, dances, sport clubs. Happy life.

Leiberato DaMota

- 210 Had 3 sisters, was the only son. Church was important in life there. He was involved in church activities, was member of choir.
- 244 Began working as photographer when 18--studied for 6 months and then set up his own business--successful. Was living at home until marriage in 1951. Wife from same village, family well-off. Custom was for people to marry only into equal social class. His father well-off but her father more so and some disapproval was evident.
- 300 Wife had maid, daughter had nursemaid. Wife never worked in Portugal or in Canada.
- 324 Visited U.S. 9 times before they moved here permanently. Had many relatives in U.S. He worked at Speidel when he came here. Got promotions and is now department head. Wife also works there.
- 390 Was involved in politics in Portugal and was forced to leave country because of this.
- 450 Was reluctant to leave Portugal, would like to go back. Had to leave father, wife and child and come to Canada.
- 496 Chose Canada because it was the only place with quotas open. Governor of his island helped with his immigration. Knew no one in Canada.

Tape 1 Side 2

- 4 Came to British Columbia because government sent him there. Jobs were available on farms there. Had opportunity to travel in U.S. with employer.
- 38 Were many Portuguese in Vancouver but none in town where he was working. Went to British Columbia by train--5 days, 4 nights. Flew from Portugal and arrived in Montreal and took train.
- 64 Life in British Columbia--not pleasant because he spoke no English, no Portuguese community, family still in Portugal.
- 86 There was a Portuguese community in Vancouver but his cousin advised him not to come because job available would be too difficult.
- 110 Heard there were many Portuguese in Toronto so he hoped to be helped there. Lived at Newman Center. Wife and daughter joined him in Toronto.
- 170 Liked Canada--people were friendly. Contrast with U.S.--has lived here 9 years and still doesn't know all his neighbors even though they're Portuguese.

Leiberato DaMota

- 190 Joined Portuguese Cultural Association here.
- 196 Missed Portuguese traditions in Canada--lived in Irish neighborhood.
- 260 Changes in Portugal--many improvements.
- 293 Was not greatly involved in Portuguese community in Toronto. Went to Portuguese church, belonged to one club.
- 355 Came to U.S. every year to visit relatives and friends.
- 390 Was not concerned that daughter might lose Portuguese heritage here.
- 417 Most of his relatives on his father's side came to U.S. about 1910. His sister was born in U.S. in 1923 then the family returned to the Azores. She came back to settle here in 1952. His mother had worked in a factory when they were in U.S.

Tape 2 Side 1

- 1 Father well-off in Portugal. Was married and one year the farm was not doing well so they decided to come to the U.S. since they had relatives here. His father disliked it in U.S.--life too fast-paced. He felt he had made a mistake. Stayed from 1910-25 in Fall River and then returned to his farm.
- 80 When he lived in Canada, his relatives encouraged him to move here.
- 110 Came to U.S., to East Providence. Left Toronto because wife wanted to be nearer her relatives. Bought home in East Providence.
- 174 Portuguese community in East Providence: when he came, people here were ashamed to speak Portuguese. That is changing now. Gradually made friends with community people.
- 218 Was friendly with other immigrants when he came here. He got jobs for several at Speidel. Finds some are not helpful to immigrants. Earlier immigrants have false idea of Portugal--they think it's still very backward and the newer immigrants are also uneducated and backward.
- 300 Portuguese who have been here for long period of time unwilling to accept the recent immigrants.

Leiberato DaMota

- 338 There are really two Portuguese communities in East Providence. He thinks Portuguese who were born here also feel same about recent immigrants--look down on them. But many of the newer immigrants are even better educated than the Portuguese here.
- 428 Situation has improved somewhat. Older Portuguese now more willing to accept speaking of Portuguese language.
- 495 Member of Portuguese Cultural Association--wanted to have opportunity to associate with Portuguese people, to speak Portuguese, to socialize.

Tape 2 Side 2

- 1 Belongs to no other organizations. Believes church has helped him preserve language, culture, customs. Now goes to Mass in English to improve his knowledge of English language. Happy with life here but still doesn't feel completely at home in U.S. Misses some of religious practices and feasts in Portugal.
- 40 Way of life here can't be compared to life in Portugal--abundance here.
- 70 Misses many things from Portugal.
- 73 Future of Portuguese in East Providence is good, he thinks. Children want to learn. Parents enthusiastic about children learning both English and Portuguese.
- 115 Came to Canada and U.S. in order to assure good education for daughter.
- 120 Very surprised by fact that he doesn't know all his Portuguese neighbors. Lives in mainly Portuguese neighborhood.