**Janet:** Hi, today is November 9th, 1995 and I am here in Taunton, Massachusetts with Mrs. Alexandrina Cunha. Who came with her entire family from Portugal, when she was nine years of age. At that time, the family came through Boston.

**Alexandrina:** Right.

**Janet:** Mrs. Cunha stayed here then for three years and went back to Portugal with her family. Then when she was 24years of age, in 1935, she came to this country, through Ellis Island, by herself.

**Alexandrina:** Right.

**Janet:** Well, I am really looking forward to everything you can remember. [Laughter]

Let’s start, if you could say your birth date and where in Portugal you were born?

**Alexandrina:** I was born in the Praia.

**Janet:** How do you spell that?

**Alexandrina:** P-R-A-I-A, Praia, [unclear 00:01:06] of course or something but Santa Maria [unclear 00:01:15].

**Janet:** Okay, and what date were you born?

**Alexandrina:** The 14th of December, 1910.

**Janet:** Okay, now did you live in Praia up until--

**Alexandrina:** Until I came back yes.

**Janet:** Yes, now when you were nine, up until that time, do you remember much about life in Praia?

**Alexandrina:** Yes, I used to like America very much when I was small of course, and I went back, no schooling, people didn’t go to school there, and we had to go, there is no running water, no bathrooms in the house, we used to go to the well and fetch the water and carry the jars on our head and-

**Janet:** Did you do that when you were that small before?

**Alexandrina:** Stop, everybody, sure, everybody because there was no places where women could work, everybody used to do farming for themselves raise corn , wheat, beans, wherever they could raise on their lands.

Just like I had a past time and my sister, this one, the one not that one, the other one, because we went, she is older than me two years, so my father took the three, and we went- three boys, three brothers.

My father was a fisherman, so he took the three boys fishing and my sister and I and my mother we used to take care of the house, take care of the cows, take care of the fields, we used to go planting, haul corn, and then we used to carry the wood, bake the bread, everybody used to bake their own breads-

**Janet:** In your home?

**Alexandrina:** No, each one has, each house has an oven through the wall, a brick oven and each one used to raise their stuff to eat, potatoes and… in fact my sister and I used to take care of even the cows.

**Janet:** Did you milk the cows?

**Alexandrina:** Yes, we milked the cows, at night the cows- that time the cows used to sleep on [unclear 00:03:59] they wouldn’t sleep on the fields, was on [unclear 00:04:02], at night we had to go over there, and far from home, the farm was not near home, and we used to go feed them again, water them. It was a tough life, I never liked that life.

**Janet:** And your father, now he was a fisherman, did he go out for long periods of time?

**Alexandrina:** No, they go, the fisherman there, even today, they go sometimes midnight, and come back late if they caught a lot of fish they’d come in earlier, depend, and still-

**Janet:** Excuse me, we going to just pause for a few--

Now you were talking about brothers, and your father and the fishing,

**Alexandrina:** Yeah, so my father used to go, bought a boat, went from here, bought a boat there, and took my three brothers, younger than me, fishing.

And when he’d come, our house is next to the ocean, big beach, beautiful beach and when he’d come close to the house he used to holla for me and my sister to go help them carry the fish.

**Janet:** You remember what kind of fish they were-

**Alexandrina:** Well they had macron, tuna, bonitos- almost like here.

**Janet:** What was your father name?

**Alexandrina:** Joe Debrager.

**Janet:** D-E

**Alexandrina:** Yeah D-E and bragger

**Janet:** And your mother name?

**Alexandrina:** Louisa Madalana, Madeleine.

**Janet**: Is that M-A-D-E-L-A-I-N-E

**Alexandrina:**  Yeah.

**Janet:** And your brothers and sisters, what was theirs?

**Alexandrina:**  My sisters that went with me was Philomena and the older brother was John, Louie and Jessie.

**Janet:** Okay and did you have grandparents living near you?

**Alexandrina:**  Yes, I had my grandfather, my father’s father was a 102 I think and then my father’s step mother, we used to call her grandmother too, they died. He died, I think two years after we went from here over there and then she lived, she was still when I came, my grandmother was still living when I came the second time.

**Janet:** What do you remember about you grandfather?

**Alexandrina:**  He was a fisherman too, very nice man. Very, very nice old man, and when we came over here to this country in 1920, he was-

Because we came 12, my father brought 12 children with him and of course we were poor, he borrowed the money for as to come, and he was sitting on a wall. I remember I can see him, crying, and he said to my father “Joe, where are you going with all these children?”

**Janet:** Now who were the 12 children? Because there were only you and your sister, three brothers-

**Alexandrina:**  No, that’s when we came the first time, that he was living

**Janet:** I see. Then there were 12? I am confused about the 12 children?

**Alexandrina:** See, when we came the first time, there was the older sister and three brothers here already, they came by themselves to my uncle, called them to come over here and then when we went back, my father only took two girls and three boys. The younger ones he ones that couldn’t work here they were not old enough to work, so we had to go with them.

**Janet:** I see so when you and your family were in the United States, then did your mother and father have more children?

**Alexandrina:** No, they all were born there.

**Janet:** So-

**Alexandrina:** And we were 14, seven boys and the seven girls, and I am the 7th girl.

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

**Alexandrina:** No.

**Janet:** No, I am confused?

**Alexandrina:** They all were born in Portugal. When my younger brother came over here he was two years old, so when we went back he was three- he was five rather, three years over here, he was two and when we got there my father even took him to go fishing, on a boat-

**Janet:** Wow.

**Alexandrina:** So we could have a share on the fish so he could sell. And everybody used to raise their own hogs, meat, there was no markets, there was no stores to sell anything but fabric cloth to make dresses or pants you had to buy that and after you have to go to a dress maker or a tailor to have it made.

**Janet:** How about shoes, what did you have for shoes?

**Alexandrina:** We had [laughter] we go bare foot, all the time. Just on Sundays we used to go to church, and everybody then used to wear shoes, and the shoes to last because the church was far from home, we used to take our shoes in our hands and put the shoes on ,near the church, that was how the things were. Today they all, with shoes on like over here. There was no markets, everybody used to raise their own hogs to kill at Christmas time.

They some of them used to kill for meat for the Christmas. They used to kill goat or sheep. And there was the one that had it and the once that didn’t have it go buy.

**Janet:** Now were you religious? Was your family religious?

**Alexandrina:** Yes, we always went to church. Yeah.

**Janet:** Which church?

**Alexandrina:** [unclear 00:11:11] [laughter]

**Janet:**  [laughter] was it a catholic church?

**Alexandrina:** Yes, oh yeah yeah—

**Janet:** Do you remember--

**Alexandrina**: Well, that time there, there was no other religion but Catholics, it was just Catholics. Now they have I think two, they have the Protestants and the Baptists, but they didn’t have that, it was just all Catholics.

**Janet:** Can you remember Christmas, how you celebrated it, was it different from here?

**Alexandrina:**  Oh Yes,

**Janet:** How was it then?

**Alexandrina:**  Well, Christmas over there, the only thing they had that we remember good, was going to church for midnight mass and then everybody like I say they kill a sheep or a goat to have meat for dinner but no gifts, no, nothing else.

They used to always tell about how Jesus was born and the story of Jesus and that was Christmas.

**Janet:** And how was Easter like?

**Alexandrina:** Easter, my mother used to bake, my mother now, it was tradition, and they used to bake sweet bread and then they used to put eggs when they bake and the dough, each of the family had an egg, apiece of that sweet bread and an egg. That was Easter.

**Janet:** Did you have any other celebrations over there that we don’t have here?

**Alexandrina:** Well there is a lot of fiestas. That’s all what they had over there. There was no theater, no dancing hall, no telephones, no electric-

**Janet:** What would go on at a fiesta?

**Alexandrina :**  Well, it was like church, it was a church going and then on the summer time- May, they had, they still have it’s a tradition, they have the holy ghost, and then they go to church [Unclear 00:13:28] and then they have women bake sweet bread and then that time they kill cows.

And each church has their own groups and then we used to go over there and they used to cook that meat and make soup out of it with the meat sweet bread, once a year. [Laughter]

**Janet:** Do you remember like births or weddings or funerals how they handled that kind of a thing?

**Alexandrina:** Well, birthdays, nobody knew about a birthday. There was no parties for birthdays, maybe some mothers they had small children they cook some eggs give each one an egg your birthday, you didn’t know when your birthday was or anything.

Weddings, they used to make the once that they could afford of course and invited just the families, the closest families to go to church and then they had a dinner or not even cows meat, they used to kill like I say, goat or sheep.

**Janet:** How about funerals, did you ever witness a funeral there?

**Alexandrina:**  Well the funerals are very poor, even, well today no, today they good but, like the people that died is laid on the house. They didn’t have no funeral parlor nothing.

They just dressed them and while they are buried in 24hours, and they had a man that make the coffins with boards, fore board I used to call it, fore boards, and covered with black cloth and that was it. And they used to be carried on four men’s shoulders.

**Janet:** How about foods, do you remember any other foods that your mother made, maybe your grandmother that you had over there?

**Alexandrina:** Well, in my house we had plenty of food. Poor food of course was potatoes, fish, plenty of fish. We used to kill two hogs a year, two pigs a year- and there was no electric, no fridge, how they preserved the meat, salted.

**Janet:** Do you remember seeing that, do you remember how they didn’t it?

**Alexandrina:** We did it. I used to help my mother doing it.

**Janet:** Oh, well tell me how it was done?

**Alexandrina:** See, they kill the pigs. This was already in 1951 when I went there. But they kill the pigs, and then they get the family that’s when they have a party. When you kill your pig around December, around the month of December, they get the family together.

And my mother used to make biscuits, sweet bread, plenty of wine and then the neighbors- you invite the neighbors. They hang the pig at the corner of the kitchen after it’s killed off course and it’s all done cleaned. You invite the neighbors to come and see the pig, and they measure with the hand which one in the neighborhood killed the fattest pig.

**Janet:** And then what

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

**Janet:** What did people do for fun?

**Alexandrina:** Well, at that time it was more friendly people than it is today, because there was no radio, no TV, we used to have fun like today was Saturday, we used to have wool and we prepare, we spin the wool. -I still have one thing upstairs,- you know like this, spin it, we get some neighbors come to my house this Saturday and will cook some corn- not on the comb, you know corn all ready and then they had, wine was plenty of wine in the island, everybody, I think everybody had wine.

And then, the boys and girls younger, they take the guitars and they’ll empty a bedroom or something and we’d dance there, the Portuguese dances over there. That was the only fun we could have. –

And my [unclear 00:19:06] he had a guitar, and my younger brother and we had a pretty good, big house and my father’s bedroom was and we used to go upstairs on Sunday, when my father didn’t go fishing and we used to get the neighborhood kids and go upstairs dance and sing and play cards.

**Janet:** Do you remember any Portuguese songs?

**Alexandrina:** I never was much of a singer. [Laughter]

**Janet:** Because I was going to ask you if you could sing some.

**Alexandrina:** No

**Janet:** No ok, so how was it decided that your family would come here when you were nine years old?

**Alexandrina:** My uncle, my father’s brother was here and there was the war of 1914 and he had two sons going to the war and he promised, if the boys, his sons, my cousins, would go- they went to war and if they come back healthy, of course, he would go to the Santa Maria [inaudible 00:20:27] and make that holy ghost feast with cows- so they did, they came back healthy and all that.

He went and make that feast over there, and my older sisters and brothers begged my uncle to come, to bring them so of course he couldn’t and they had to know how to read. None of them knew how to read or write, my father did, so my uncle says well you go with them and after they are there we take care. So my oldest is over there when they’re 20, so they have to go.

He was in St. Michael, at a service, my father went there and told them and he says no, if you go, I don’t care if you go, if you go, you take my mother and my youngest brothers and sisters.

And I will stay, because he had to stay coz he couldn’t come, he says “Am a man, I can stay alone better than my mother can stay just with the small children” then my father went and borrowed the money and that’s how we came.

**Janet:** Now you say your uncle did that festival for his sons? so in other words how would that work, somebody would have an occasion and they would provide everything for the festival?

**Alexandrina:** Yeah, yeah, like my uncle he provide everything because he had a promise like the church.

The ghost they have a mass, and after the mass, they have men cooking, they have a weak woman cooking, baking bread and lots of stuff and then on a Thursday, they killed some cows and cook it and all the peoples goes over there and eat for free.

**Janet:** And then this brings a blessing on his sons? Is that what that was?

**Alexandrina:** Yes, yes, that’s the faith they had.

**Janet:** Yeah, yeah, so, do you remember the trip over the first time?

**Alexandrina:** Over here?

**Janet:** Mhmm

**Alexandrina:** Yes, we came through Boston and I think it was a man, a man died on the ship. Used to take us nine days to get over here.

**Janet:** This would have been 1919. Right after the First World War was over, right?

**Alexandrina:** Alright then-

**Janet:** -uhuuh,

**Alexandrina:** So-

**Janet:** 1918, it could have been,

**Alexandrina:** No, It was 1920,

**Janet:**  1920, oh because your birthday is in December. Right ok 1920

**Alexandrina:** So, a man died aboard the ship.

**Janet:** Oh.

**Alexandrina:** I don’t know then what happened you know- and I remember they covered him and throw them overboard.

**Janet:** You saw that when you were –

**Alexandrina:** Yeah, because that takes nine days, used to take nine days, so we had to go what do you call it?

**Janet:** Steerage?

**Alexandrina:** We had to go to an Island in Boston, to get sterilized,

**Janet:** Oh

**Alexandrina:** And we stayed there 21 days.

**Janet:** Really? Do you remember anything about that, those 21days?

**Alexandrina:** Well my mother took sick, my mother, I, my sister and my brother Joe and my sister Rose, we all went to the hospital, we all get sick in the boat and we went to the hospital. So my other sisters and my father and my other brothers, they had to be on an Island, on an Island there

**Janet:** You sure it wasn’t Ellis Island? Because there is another island that people go to when they have-

**Alexandrina:** In Boston?

**Janet:** No, no,

**Alexandrina:** No, we came through Boston, it was in Boston.

**Janet:** Now, do you know what sickness the family had?

**Alexandrina:** We just were sea sick I guess.

**Janet:** But you stayed 21days?

**Alexandrina:** But we stayed 21 days, yeah and then my brothers, my older brothers, three brothers were here already and they went over there, they used to go to Boston. They brought us- I came over here, the first time bare foot.

It was my younger three brothers, my three sisters we came bare foot. Then when we got to Boston on that island, my brothers bought some shoes and they took shoes to us and we came to Fall River then. We lived in Fall River three years.

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

**Alexandrina:** Oh, it was beautiful, there was no radios yet and no TV but there was that microphone they call it

**Janet:** The troller?

**Alexandrina:**  The troller, yes. My father bought one. It was the age not to go to school, we went to school.

**Janet:** What was school like in Fall River for you?

**Alexandrina:** Good, it was nice school,

**Janet:** Were you able to learn English?

**Alexandrina:**  Yes I did, I was in the 4th- my sister got to the 5th grade and I got to the 4th grade in three years. I started with not knowing a word or understanding a word and in three years I could write because that what I wanted.

And when my father went back I didn’t want go, I wanted to stay with my older brother, but my father says no, you are not be old enough to work, your brother isn’t going to because he was married already my brother- says he isn’t going to be tired up with you so, but I never liked it over there, never.

**Janet:** Do you remember what helped you in learning the language?

**Alexandrina:** Because I didn’t want to be called a green horn. They used to call the people that came from the old country green horns. I never forget that,

**Janet:** What did that mean exactly, do you know what it meant when they called you green horn?

**Alexandrina:** Don’t know, I don’t know, but they used to call that, we had to learn, we would come home, talk to my sisters here and there we understand one word the next we didn’t and we learnt.

**Janet:** What was your mothers and father attitude? Did they want to became Americanized or they didn’t want to became-

**Alexandrina:** No, my mother didn’t want to go back for nothing in the world and she had a lot of work.

She had 14 children, bake here because we used to buy the bread from the bakery, of course she used to cook and all that, there was no washing machines.

She used to wash by hand and then when my oldest brother, the one that stayed behind, that was in the service, he came a year after us and when he got here my father was working ,he didn’t want my father to work, he wanted my father to help my mother, and my father didn’t work.

But my father never like it over here because he wanted to go fishing, even when he wanted to go, my brothers, my oldest brothers they promised him.

Even they wanted to go to a lawyer, make a paper. My oldest brother get married when the next younger kid started to work and then the next, when everybody was working and he didn’t want it.

He wanted to go back and my mother didn’t want to go and it was hard it was very hard, coz my mother loved this country, she had a lot of work but she loved this country. And then she left-out of 14 she took five back because we were small and all the rest they stayed here.

**Janet:** I see. What did your father do for work here? Before your brother took over?--

**Alexandrina:** He worked on the Fall River mills, where they used to make the weave cloth, yes

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

**Alexandrina:** There still is [laughter] Fall River you call it St. Michael, all people from there. Even when I came by myself, I came to live with my sister, we came to Fall River. I came in a boat from New York to Fall River on a boat, there was a ferry boat running, so I came, and I lived two years there, then I met my husband, got married and came to Taunton.

**Janet:** Okay. Well, what was it like for you before we go on to you meeting your husband and everything, what was it that when you went back to Portugal? What was it like for you to go back, [inaudible 00:31:16] for three years and then go back?”

**Alexandrina:** Well, to tell you the truth, the honest God truth it was hell. I didn’t like it over there, I didn’t like it, I didn’t like the way they- we got there, no shoes on, work on the fields, carry wood to burn, to bake bread, to cook the food and everything. Go to the water to the wells, carry water, take care of the cows, go work on the fields, that was- to me it was hell, I didn’t like.

**Janet:** How did your brothers and sisters feel, the once who had been here and went back?

**Alexandrina:** None of them liked it they, in the end they all came back.

**Janet:** So really it was just your father who really liked it?

**Alexandrina:** Yeah, it was my father, they stayed there. I came to this country and then I stayed two years like I said, I got married, a man from Santa Maria too. [Laughter]

**Janet:** How did you know him?

**Alexandrina:** I didn’t.

**Janet:** When you married him you didn’t?

**Alexandrina:** Well, I meet him here, not there, I didn’t know, no family was from the other side of the island so, I didn’t’ t know them, and then they begged us to come, they want to come, they wanted to come.

My father was still living, then my father died, my brother John that was next to me, he wanted to come so, at that time you had to mail them to come over here, you had to make papers, those papers. Those papers had to go to Washington and then in Washington they approved them to give them the visa to come, so my husband and I called, first one was my brother, and we had bought a house already of course we didn’t have money, but we had the house.

Finally came and I wrote to Washington even this agent in Fall River, he said “Oh you can never push your brother over here,” I say, “Well let’s try,” I said you going write to Washington telling them the story, I did.

I couldn’t write, you know, but this agent wrote for me, telling them that the whole family here, the whole story and we never liked it over there, so they approved in Washington for my brother John to come and then the others wanted to come, but my mother was still living.

**Janet:** Didn’t your mother want to come too?

**Alexandrina:** Well she was old already and she had cancer,

**Janet:** Oh.

**Alexandrina:** So, then I used to write to my brothers, I used to say, now you can- and my sister the one over there, that one got married, this one on this side and I used to say “No, while my mother is living, I won’t do anymore,” say somebody has to take care of her—

**Janet:** Just to back up for a minute, when you went back to Portugal, you went back and youmust have been there from 1923 to 1935, you were there for a long time when you went back?

**Alexandrina:** Yes, Well I could never come because before, one thing my father didn’t want me to come in the first place because of course I was the horse around the house, in working and so I wrote to my sister. My older sister, my older sister was here and I wrote to her, and this was right after the depression. The ports were closed nobody would come in to the United States so, my sister over here tried hard and then she had a farm.

My brother in-law was a boss in one of the mills in Fall River, cotton mills, and finally, I was the second passport signed, after they opened the immigration for people to come over.

And after my mother died I called my two brothers and my sister, the one with the black there and so everybody even the agents said you can’t get it. But I wrote.

I wrote to Washington, at that time, it wasn’t the agent that wrote, it was I wrote it and I had this- because I couldn’t write very good, [inaudible 00:37:04] the way I say it is, you just write what I tell you, she wrote [inaudible00:37:07] and then I went to all my brothers and then Washington sent me a form to fill that. I went to all of my brothers and said this is for all them to sign, to get the family together we did, they all came over-

**Janet:** You must have felt good about that--?

**Alexandrina:** Yeah, so only my father and mother died there and all the family died here.

**Janet:** Oh aha, aha, now you mentioned earlier that you feel you are an American, but your heart is in Portugal, what do you mean by that?

**Alexandrina:** Well today the things are different, see, I went there 19- the first time I went there after the second time, it was already different and it’s peaceful over there.

Seven years ago- when my mother died we had the house and of course it was everybody’s house , so I wanted to build a house, my sister was living there the one that got married there, and nobody wanted to sell-