

The Peace Drum Project

Elder's Stories - 2007

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Introduction

Each year we look forward to our meetings and activities with the elders who share their stories, thoughts, humor, wisdom, understanding, and encouragement with the *Peace Drum Project's* teen participants. The experience of getting to know these wonderful elders and hearing their stories has been truly rewarding. We know that we have only scratched the surface of their stories in this process, but we hope that introducing them to you will enrich your lives as it has ours. These stories are filled with wisdom and life experience that young people today can learn from and honor. In spite of the differences between eras, the teens learn that many hopes, dreams, *and* obstacles remain constant across generations. Learning first hand that others have faced similar challenges — and have overcome them — gives power to their own hopes and dreams.

We are delighted with the respectful way in which the teens conducted their interviews, and by how the elders were willing to share their very personal experiences and knowledge with our young people. This bridge across the generations reduces isolation and builds new connections between youth, families, and elders that strengthen our whole community. We look forward to continuing this process for many more years.

This year we offer special thanks to Lucia Rodriguez-Sweeney for transcribing and translating the stories of the Spanish-speaking elders. We also thank Cynthia Jimenez, Resident Services Coordinator at Julia Martin House, Nancy Escoto, Resident Services Coordinator at Nate Smith House, and Julia Martin of Bromley Heath, Community Activist and grandmother, for their help in locating elders who wanted to take part in the project this year.

We dedicate these stories to the memory of Charles M. Holley (1937-2006,) CAI co-founder, and inspiration behind The Peace Drum Project. He is greatly missed by all the teens and graduates, elders, artists, and others who knew and worked with him over the years

Susan E. Porter, Director
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Julia Martin

Interviewed by Eric Robinson, Aboubakar Sherif & Curtis Jones

My name is Julia Katrina Martin. I'm named after my grandmother. I was born on July 2, 1929, in Wareham, MA— down the Cape. Wareham was a small village at that time, a small community on the water. A lot of the men were fishermen, and they picked cranberries and strawberries. My parents came from Cape Verde, so the only kind of work they knew how to do when they got here was farming, fishing, things like that.

My mother's name was Adeline Baptiste Delgado until she got married. My father's name was Joseph Lopes Fontes. I have six brothers and two sisters— Walter, David, Avelino, Melvin, Albert, Manuel, Elizabeth and Gloria. The most important things I've learned from my family were to share, to be kind to one another, and to always help other people, especially those who are in need.

My father was a fisherman and a farmer, and he was also a chef. He was a good cook and he did a lot of work in the big restaurants. During the war, there were shortages, but we were lucky because my father caught fish and we had a garden, so we had food to eat even though you couldn't get some things. My mother was a baker, so she would get flour and bake bread and sell it to the other people in the village. So that was how we got some money to live on. And some of our clothes were made out of flour sack bags. The flour would come in these pretty cloth bags printed with flowers on them and so my mother would take them apart and make dresses for us.

There were shortages so everything was rationed. Everyone had little books of stamps we used to get our rations. I remember standing in line for things like flour, sugar, you couldn't get butter. That's how margarine came into use. I remember getting a big 'blunk' of white stuff, then you'd put a little dot of yellow in it and mix it up.

During World War II you couldn't get tires for your car, or cigarettes, so the men had to roll up Bugle tobacco. And we had to have really dark shades to hide the lights in the house, and sometimes we had to keep the lights off like a bomb shelter. It was a terrible time then. Yes, we were going to school during the whole time. I was in about fourth and fifth grade. We liked to play volley ball, go swimming and jump rope. Those were the things that we did when I was young. During those years, my best friends at school were Ruby Zien, and one named Beatrice Lopes. Then there was Mamie Martin and Doris Martin. Believe it or not, I married into their family later, but when I was young, I didn't know that was going to happen!

The war didn't affect my life day to day because it wasn't here in this country. But it did affect us because a lot of those fellows that we knew were over there fighting in France and Germany. A lot of them didn't make it back.

Like they say, "it takes a village to raise a child.." It really was like that. Everybody was our mother, everybody was our grandmother. Everyone watched out for each other. I lived with my parents until I was about 12 years old - that was in Wareham. Then I had to go into a foster home. That's when I came to Boston where I lived on West Canton Street in the South End. It was very quiet there because it was a dead end street. But, the Cape I loved best because we lived near the water and you could do more things. I came to Boston to go to private school. It was a parochial school.

In the foster home I was raised by this lady named Mrs. Atkinson. We called her Mother Atkinson. She was a good foster mother. She raised about 16 of us girls, and would listen and she also expected us to help each other. Oh yes, we had to be in at a certain time. When we were young, it was six o'clock, but when we got older (teens) it was ten o'clock. No, I never got in trouble. Everyone had chores around the house, and Ms. Atkinson tried to give each girl something to do that she was good at. My job was to pay the bills, and I did the shopping for the house, so I didn't have to do any cleaning.

My friends were mostly the girls that I was raised with in the foster home, and one of my foster brothers. There were fourteen of us girls. We were close friends because we lived in the same house and we went to school together. I was kind of a loner more than anything else. My best friend was Ann Cummins. At that age we went to the movies and went skating for fun. I was a cheerleader and I played the drums in the drum and bugle corps at the Blessed Sacrament. We were called the Cardinal Cushing Cadets. After school, sometimes we would go to the Harriet Tubman House, and there was another place called the Lincoln House in the South End. I use to like to go to baseball games, basketball games, and things like that, too. When I was older, for entertainment we would go to dances and parties. I loved to dance, and it was more like neighborhood dances or school dances in the basement of the church.

I loved school. My favorite subject was math. I wasn't that great in English. My favorite teachers. When I lived down the Cape, Ms. Anderson was one of them, and Ms. Andrews was another one. Then in Boston I went to parochial school, and I remember Sister Maria and Sister Eugenia and Sister Katherine that I liked. The best teacher I ever had was Sister Katherine because she took me aside and helped me. I didn't speak very good English then, but she made me study and worked with me to help me pronounce my words correctly. She took time out to work with me to get me where I'm at now.

The most exciting thing that happened when I was young, was that we would march all over the City of Boston with the drum and bugle corps. We would march in the cemetery for Memorial Day, and in competitions. We were the best drum and bugle corps in Boston, so it was a lot of fun.

My first date, I was probably about 16, I think we went to the movies. It's hard to remember some of those things. But because of my circumstances, I had to grow up and be independent at a very early age. Not having a mother and a father with me, I had to learn to do a lot of things for myself. When I got out of school my life changed a lot because I had to take care of myself. I had to get a job, buy my own clothes, find a place to live. It was a lot of responsibility.

My dream when I was younger was that I thought I was going to be a big time ice skater. When I was young there was a fantastic ice skater named Sonya Henie, and I wanted to be like her. So when I went out on the ice I would pretend that I was her. But, it didn't happen, of course. Then later, I wanted to become a nurse, so I went to Children's Hospital in the nursing program. But when I got married and started having children one after another, that went out the window too! I always knew I wanted to grow up and get married and have six children - that was my life purpose, so I got pretty close to that. I had five children!

Then I got married in 1948. I was living in the South End. My husband worked and I stayed home with the children when they were young. I married a gentleman who was also from Cape Verde. I had my first child when I was twenty. We ended up having five children. My husband believed in staying home with the children, so I was a stay-at-home mom. Luckily, I had a good husband, and it was a very good marriage. Unfortunately my husband died young. He died in 1972, so I've been a widow since then. But the years we had together were very good.

The best job I ever had was being a detective. I did that for twenty five years. It was exciting, it kept you on your toes, you learned how to look at someone and remember the description of that person. It was very interesting, and I really liked it a lot. I interrogated people, I arrested people, and I worked under-cover in both hotels and stores. It was very exciting work.

Yes, I did drive after my husband died, but I don't drive now. I drove for a living. I went to school when I was forty-five years old. I was a driving supervisor, so my place of employment paid for me to get my license. It was down on Blue Hill Ave. where I went to driving school. I did really well on my first driving test. The guy thought I had already been driving, but I hadn't. I just watched my husband drive.

In the 1960's I got involved with the community. I did a lot of volunteer work. I was with the group that worked to get the Martha Eliot Health Center there where it is today, and to get the day care center open. We were a group of ten mothers called Mothers for Action. We started small and just did little things, then big things began to happen. I was very active in the schools, and I was the parent chairperson of the PTA at the Jefferson School, then at the Curley School, I opened the library at the Curley School. We also got the Stop & Shop here in the community, so we were trying to get more services into this community. My life really began here in Jamaica Plain, in Bromley Heath.

The scariest thing that ever happened was a big fire in the factory that was right here in the middle of Bromley Heath. I think it was 1976. There were flames everywhere, and they had to evacuate everyone include the elderly people who were in a building right here. We thought everything was going to explode. We all had to grab our children and get out. That burned for almost a week because the gas tanks kept exploding. So everyone had to be moved. It was winter time and the water froze as the firemen put it on the fire. We were lucky no one was killed.

My favorite kind of music is jazz. A favorite song? I use to like Ella Fitzgerald, so probably it would have been *A Tisket A Tasket*. I use to sing that all the time when I was young. Right now I'm more into church music, but that was my jazz favorite.

My favorite color is lilac, because it's soothing. It's light and easy on the eyes. This color I have on here is lilac. I like the flowers in springtime when everything is budding and blooming. This is my favorite season. It's beautiful, and it's not too hot and it's not too cold. It helps you bounce back after the wintertime.

I like *The Young and The Restless*— it's a soap opera. I've been watching that for twenty-something years! Right now, in the evening, I also like *American Idol* and *Dancing with The Stars*. But the soaps I like because over time you see many chapters of a person's life, and I like that.

A funny thing that happened to me? Well, I remember one time a hurricane was coming. I was down the Cape then. We were running to catch the last bus that was leaving, and while I was running, I lost my shoe. So I had to leave my shoe behind. I came home shoeless, and when my father asked me where my shoe was, I told him it must have been back at the bus station! That was kind of funny!

The most important things to me in life now are my children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. They are the most precious thing in my life right now. And, to stay healthy.

The hardest thing I ever had to do in my life was to bury two of my children. I had two children who died a month apart. One died in August, then three weeks later the other one died in September, 1999. They were both very, very sick. My daughter was 43 and my son was 50. It was even harder than burying my husband. My husband, it really hurt, but there was nothing worse than burying my own children. It still bothers me a lot.

The first thing I do when I get up in the morning, is to go to this window here and thank the Lord for giving me another day. And I think about doing a kind deed every day, and if I'm not doing that, help me to do it better. What makes me the happiest? I have a little great grandson who has disabilities. I took care of him until he was three, but now he's gone to school. He couldn't walk, but we worked on helping him walk, and he can do that very well now. He doesn't have any elbows or shoulders and his hands are dropped, so he still has disabilities, but what I live for everyday is to see him progress and get better. His name is Darryl. We all helped him walk...me, Mary Carroll, Ms. Rogers. They didn't think he would ever walk, but he does.

My husband was Eugene Martin

My children are Eugene, William, Stephen, Cynthia and Diane.