

# “Having Our Say”

Voices from the Cape Verdean Community

John reflects on his career.



“There has never been a plumber in the city of New Bedford of Cape Verdean Heritage. I’m the first one... it’s all in the Standard Times”

– John Senna

John Senna  
December 9, 2010

Interview with John Senna  
Conducted December 9, 2010  
By Ann Marie Lopes

## *Beginning of File*

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - The interviewer is Ann Marie Lopes and it is Friday, November 19, 2010. And I am here interviewing –

**JOHN SENNA** - Joao A. -- John Senna, born in New Bedford, Massachusetts, February 20th, 1932.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - OK. So as I said, we're just going to have a conversation. I understand your family goes all the way back to whaling.

**JOHN SENNA** - My grandfather was a whaler, but he was a sea captain, also, from the Cape Verde Islands.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - So he was a sea captain in the Islands?

**JOHN SENNA** - In the Cape Verde Islands. He traveled all over -- he traveled to Brazil as captain, and the United States, and then the European countries.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - From what island?

JOHN SENNA - From the island of Brava. He came to this country in 1872.

ANN MARIE LOPES - And he came to New Bedford?

JOHN SENNA - Yes. On the whaling -- on the Bark... The captain of the bark brought him here.  
And...

ANN MARIE LOPES - Do you know the name of the bark? (sound of papers shuffling) Oh. It's a proclamation from the City Council.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. Got one from the governor. I got one that your father signed there, too.

ANN MARIE LOPES - From the Recognition Committee?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. They recognized me being -- the achievement as the only minority that got a master plumber's license in the city of New Bedford.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, wow.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. There was -- no other minority ever -- got a -- no other -- there was no -- the first Cape Verdean in the city of New Bedford. Because there has never been a plumber in the city of New Bedford of Cape Verdean heritage. I'm the first one.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Wow. That's incredible. That's impressive.

JOHN SENNA - I went through hell to do it, too. This is the beginning of it. Yeah. That's one -- it's all in the Standard Times. Markey was mayor at the time.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, wow. This -- Armand DeManche?

JOHN SENNA - DeManche.

ANN MARIE LOPES - DeManche.

JOHN SENNA - This is a --

ANN MARIE LOPES - Racial slurs. Wow. This is great.

JOHN SENNA - And it's all in the Standard Times down there and at the library.

ANN MARIE LOPES - I'm reading his remarks.

JOHN SENNA - Oh, yeah. He made quite a -- (laughter). Yeah. He had a lot of remarks.

ANN MARIE LOPES - This is in 1975. You'd think he would know better.

JOHN SENNA - I know it.

ANN MARIE LOPES - And he said this to a reporter.

JOHN SENNA - It's amazing I got my plumber's license. My journeyman's. And the year after that I got my master's.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Master's in plumbing?

JOHN SENNA - In plumbing.

ANN MARIE LOPES - I didn't know that you could get a master's in plumbing.

JOHN SENNA - Yes, I have.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Did he really apologize to you, this man, for...?

JOHN SENNA - Not really.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh.

JOHN SENNA - He said it in the paper, but he didn't...

ANN MARIE LOPES - Now, back to your grandfather.

JOHN SENNA - Oh, back to my grandfather. The captain was Captain Berry on the -- I forgot the name of the bark. I've got it written down... I've got to find the papers. And he picked them up in 1872, and he... they sailed, and he came to the city of New Bedford, and the ship sailed in 1877. And he got off -- he stayed here in New Bedford for quite awhile. And then he went back to the Cape Verde Islands again, and he sailed out of the Cape Verde Islands then on different ships -- I didn't know which ones they were -- for a little while around the Cape Verde Islands, running to Africa, Madeira islands, and Azores, and different Cape Verde Islands. And then he came back to New Bedford on his own ship that he became the captain of, the... what was the name of that ship? The Rachel? Or... what... I'm trying to think of the name of his ship. The...

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - What is his name?

**JOHN SENNA** - Julio M. Fernandes.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - M or N?

**JOHN SENNA** - M. So he came here on the ship. He sailed into New Bedford and I then checked the libraries, it's up there. He stayed here; he brought a cargo, I think, with salt, into the United States from the Cape Verde Islands. And he took the cargo back from the United States -- I think he took lumber back to the Cape Verde Islands. I wasn't too sure about that, but I think that's what he told me. And he sailed around there for quite awhile, and then he went to Brazil -- he sailed to Brazil, and then he came back to Cape Verde Islands and he got on another ship, the Veracruz II. What happened then -- and he was coming to the United States on the Veracruz II, and sailing in here, and he found that he had stowaways on board the ship. So when the ship was coming in, he found out, coming into Buzzards Bay, coming into the harbor, he knew the immigration men and the customs agents were going out to meet the ship. But he couldn't do it because he had the immigrants. He would have been in trouble. He turned the ship around, went down the coast of the United States, and went into Charleston, South Carolina. But before he went into South Carolina, he ran into a storm. He lost his main mast, but he made it into Charleston, South Carolina. There, he -- went ashore, he had all the papers made out for the people that were on board the ship. He went ashore and met with the authorities. And they came back to the ship -- they wanted to arrest him because he had immigrants on there.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Were these Cape Verdean immigrants?

**JOHN SENNA** - Yeah. And so what happened was he spoke to the people on board the ship that they were going to arrest him, so he had to leave the ship there. But he left them with all of the papers necessary for them to survive in this country. So he left the ship, and the authorities down there were looking for him. He made his way back here to New Bedford, and the authorities were looking for him in New Bedford, too. Because they notified them up here. But what he did was, he got in contact with other sea captains that were here, and they were going back out to sea, the whalers. So they smuggled him onto one of the whaling ships in a wheelbarrow.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - (laughter)

**JOHN SENNA** - Put him in a wheelbarrow -- he was small -- in a wheelbarrow, and smuggled him out to sea. When he got out to sea, they opened the barrel and he got out. And so he went back to the Cape Verde Islands to try to straighten out the people that were the owners of the Veracruz. But they finally admitted that, you know, that they knew that the immigrants were there -- they were making money on it, but they didn't tell them anything about it. But in the archives down in Chelsea, South Carolina, the people said "he stole the people's money." They didn't have money -- they had jewelry, you know. That's what they gave him. So I asked -- I said, I know the real story; he told me everything. Because I used to sit with him when he was an elderly man. You know, sit down and talk, listen to him talk about the whaling and all this. When I was a young boy. Him and this other man, Mr. Monteiro, her grandfather -- you know, Bella, the Texeiras --

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Bella...

**JOHN SENNA** - She used to live on Acushnet Avenue.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Yeah.

**JOHN SENNA** - Yeah. Her grandfather was great friends with my grandfather. They used to come down and smoke their pipes together, down in the basement, when I was a little boy -- I was about twelve, thirteen years old -- and sit down and listen to them talk about the adventures of the sailing.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Neat.

**JOHN SENNA** - And it was fascinating, you know. And it's too bad I didn't put anything down on paper. I just put it in my mind, you know. But I remember quite a bit, but there's a lot that I didn't remember. But then after he was in this country for quite a while, he went back to the old country. That's when he got married to my grandmother.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - OK. What year is this, do you know?

**JOHN SENNA** - He got married... I think it was -- the first child was born in 18... it must have been around 1895. The first child was over that. And when his children were big, the two oldest boys -- they came to this country in 1910. That was Henry and John Fernandes. And they stayed here; they didn't go back no more. They stayed here and worked here. When World War I broke out, they both went into the service.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Were they -- they were Cape Verdean citizens. They weren't American citizens.

JOHN SENNA - They were Cape Verdean citizens, because my grandfather took his citizens' papers out in 1890.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Citizens for -- 1890 for the United States.

JOHN SENNA - United States, 1890. They were automatic -- they were citizens, because he had the citizen papers. So they went into the service in World War I. And my grandfather went back to the old country after 19-- he brought them here; he brought all of his family back here to the United States in 1912.

ANN MARIE LOPES - So we're talking his...

JOHN SENNA - All his children.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, he had more children?

JOHN SENNA - Oh, yeah. He had... it was... Henry, John, Josephine, Peter, Mary, Joseph, and he had my mother, Virginia, then he had another son they named Joseph, and then he had the last one was Alfred.

ANN MARIE LOPES - So we're talking one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK. So he brought everybody with him. So everybody was born in Cape Verde?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. They all were born in Cape Verde.

ANN MARIE LOPES - He brought everybody from Cape Verde.

JOHN SENNA - Mm-hmm. In 1912 they came, the whole family. And they settled here in New Bedford. And the house they first owned was on Madison Street -- which address, I don't know; they tore the house down. Then after that, he bought a home on Acushnet Avenue. That was 234 Acushnet Avenue at the time. It was a beautiful home. Big house, big barn in the back. The

neighborhood was a beautiful neighborhood. Everybody's neighbor knew everybody. Everybody on that block knew everybody.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - What block are you talking about? Between what streets?

**JOHN SENNA** - Between Russell Street and Madison Street: that whole block. Both sides of the street. And everybody knew everybody. I used to play on -- that's the -- I couldn't leave that block. We had to play right on that block, you know.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Mm-hmm.

**JOHN SENNA** - But that's where -- I played that out there, and it was me -- I played it with myself, Cesar Duarte -- we used to play together -- and Anthony Fonseca. And we were the two -- three youngest boys in that neighborhood. And the other -- older boys were Guy Oliviera, Georgie Pinto, Frank "Fudgie" Santos --

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Yeah, Fudgie.

**JOHN SENNA** - Yeah. His brother, Louie "Poppy" Santos -- his brother.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Right. Was he really Popsicle? Was that Pop -- or was he just --

**JOHN SENNA** - Popsicle.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Yeah.

**JOHN SENNA** - Who else there? Oh, and Joe Gomes. Joseph Gomes. Joe and Tony Gomes. Two brothers. And in fact they live right over here now. And we all grew up in that neighborhood. It was a wonderful neighborhood. It was nice, clean, and everything was good. We had the store down the street -- Joe Antunes's store. That's where we used to go buy our penny candy.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Is this Laila?

**JOHN SENNA** - Huh?

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Is this Laila? Lala?

**JOHN SENNA** - No, not Lala.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Lala.

JOHN SENNA - Lala was down the street. That was down the street.

ANN MARIE LOPES - So Joe Antunes' store.

JOHN SENNA - Joe Antunes.

ANN MARIE LOPES - That's on Purchase Street?

JOHN SENNA - No, Acushnet Avenue.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK.

JOHN SENNA - But he moved to Purchase Street after. After when they tore the houses down for Bay Village.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Did he move where Johnny Pappas' store is now?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK. So that's Purchase between Madison and...

JOHN SENNA - Russell.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Russell. So it's on your same block, so you could go.

JOHN SENNA - One block. That's where I grew up. And then when they tore down the homes there, in order to build Bay Village, all the people in that community separated.

ANN MARIE LOPES - That's around 1941, right?

JOHN SENNA - 1939.

ANN MARIE LOPES - '39. OK.

JOHN SENNA - And that's when I moved to -- we moved -- my grandfather bought the home on Purchase Street. 511. And that's where -- I finished growing up there, 511, until I was about 16 years old. Then I left New Bedford and I went out to sea.

ANN MARIE LOPES - As a fisherman?

JOHN SENNA - No.



ANN MARIE LOPES - As a...

JOHN SENNA - As a merchant seaman.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK.

JOHN SENNA - And I went out to sea there, because I quit school, because my mother was having a hard time because my father was... he didn't support the family that well, so I knew my mother was having a hard time. And so when I was a young kid, I wouldn't go to school. I'd skip school just to go to work. And I couldn't wait to be 16 years old so I could go to work full-time. And that's what I did. So instead of staying in school -- my mother encouraged me to stay in school, but I told her, "No," I told her, "you need help." I had three sisters. So I quit school and I went to work. And then I had a chance to go in the merchant marine at 16 years old, and I got my seaman papers and I went out to sea. And that's how I helped my mother.

ANN MARIE LOPES - What was that like?

JOHN SENNA - It was good. You know you sail on one of them oil tankers. And I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it. Young fellow, you know, and it was good money at the time. And...

ANN MARIE LOPES - How long were you out at a time?

JOHN SENNA - Most of the time it was six months. You know, a five-, six-month voyage. I traveled all over the world, but that's -- as a young man, I was intrigued with all the different foreign countries that I went to.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Like what? Where did you go?

JOHN SENNA - I went to... my first trip was to go to -- we went to Montevideo, Uruguay. And from there we went to Argentina. And we left there we went to Cape Town, South Africa.

ANN MARIE LOPES - And you got off and could see these places.

JOHN SENNA - Yes.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Nice.

JOHN SENNA - And then from there I went up -- the ship -- we went up to a place called Ras Tanura up in the Cape Verde Isla-- uh, in the Persian Gulf. And we loaded cargo there. And we

were there for about two days loading cargo. And we left there, came back through the Red Sea, through the Suez Canal, through the Mediterranean, and out in the Atlantic Ocean again, went to Montreal, Canada, and discharged the cargo at Montreal. And then from there we came back to New York City, and that's where I got off the ship, in New York City. I got -- I came home on vacation. 30 days' vacation. A leave of vacation. And then I stayed home and then I got ready to go back out to sea again after 30 days. And the second voyage, I boarded the ship in New York City and went to Aruba. And from Aruba we went to Hamburg, Germany. And from Hamburg, Germany, we went right back to Aruba again and picked up a cargo. Went to the Panama Canal, and we went to Yokohama, Japan.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Oh, wow.

**JOHN SENNA** - And then from there we went to the Persian Gulf to pick up a cargo in the Persian Gulf. And we came back down through the Suez Canal -- to the Red Sea through the Suez Canal again. And went to... was it Germany? I think it was Hamburg, Germany again, if I'm not mistaken. I think it was Hamburg, German, because... And then after that, we discharged the cargo there and we came back -- we were supposed to come back home, but they sent us to the Persian Gulf again to pick up another cargo, and we came and went to Italy. And from Italy, we came back to the United States. And I got off the ship there in the United States -- here, again, and (inaudible) was in Baltimore, Maryland. And then I came home.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - What was your favorite place? Did you have a favorite place?

**JOHN SENNA** - My favorite place was Brazil.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Why?

**JOHN SENNA** - I loved it down there. People were friendly at that time. They were friendly and beautiful. The people were beautiful. And, you know, I could speak the language, so that made it easier for me, you know.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Mm-hmm. Because they spoke Portuguese and you spoke Portuguese?

**JOHN SENNA** - I spoke Portuguese. I spoke both Portuguese and Cape Verdean. I speak more Cape Verdean than I do Portuguese. And it was so nice... you know, while I was down there, it was beautiful. I enjoyed it there. We were there for about a week.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Oh, so you got to see...

**JOHN SENNA** - We saw a lot of things.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Mm-hmm.

JOHN SENNA - I did a lot of touring around there. And I left Brazil and we came back to Aruba -- that's our main port near Cabos, is Aruba. Or Venezuela. They used to call it Amway Bay in Venezuela. Or Bara Caibo in Venezuela. We picked up cargo there. And then another place we went to was a place called Campana. Campana, (inaudible). I think it was Campana -- in Brazil. Up in the jungles, the ship and the river, up through the jungles. Jungles on both sides. All you could see was monkeys flying around, jumping around. I'll never forget the -- I went -- we went -- the ship went -- they had to get -- in order to make the ship turn around, they had to go up to the bank, climb the bank, then back out and dock. So we all -- everybody stayed there. So the other guys who were on the ship when we stayed there said "Hey, let's go to the shore." But they had a U.S.S. canteen there, just for seamen to go to shore. Mail your letters and have a beer, anything like that. You're not supposed to go into town. So I told him, hey, man, we've got to go into town, you know.

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter)

JOHN SENNA - (laughter) So we did. We snuck into town. We walked down that road. Didn't think anything was wrong. We get into town, and now it's getting dark at night, and we're going to walk back with no lights, and there's a bus going back. So we waited for the bus. So the bus driver says "How'd you people get up here?" We says, "We walked." "You what? You're not supposed to walk that road." We said, "Why?" He said, "Because there's a lot of people that walk this road and disappear, and you never see them again." I said, "No." He said, "Yeah. Some of these natives down there are still wild. They still believe in killing. You know, the natives down there." So we come back, and so we go to the canteen, and I'm sitting down there, and one of the natives that worked there was looking and he had a big machete in his hand. I said "What's that for?" He said, "The boys want to go in the jungle and see if they could get a parrot or a monkey." I said, "Who's going in there?" "You want to go?" I said, "Not me." And so then he said, "I don't know." I said, "I can't see from here to there. It's dark." I says, "I don't know what's on the other side of that." So in the meantime, there's a big hole in the screen -- they had a screen -- I could almost climb in through there.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, jeez.

JOHN SENNA - He just chopped the head off. I says, "So that's why the machete there." And these other guys, the other three guys that we were together, they said "We're going to go in there." They put on their boots, they went down there into the water swamp. And I says -- they gave each one of them machetes. I says "What good is that going to do you if something comes after

you?" I said, "I ain't going. I'll watch you guys from here." So I stayed there and I watched them. (laughter) And no one -- they left, and two feet into the bush, you couldn't see them no more. That's how tense -- intense it was. So they walked around there, didn't get nothing, they came back, all dirty, filthy, muddy, and everything like that. And I said, "You guys have got to be fooling. Look what's over there. Crocodiles." And I says -- he says, "Oh, we didn't see nothing like that." I said, "No, they were watching you, though."

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter)

JOHN SENNA - (laughter) So they -- yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter) They were saying, "Oh, that looks like lunch."

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. They never came back. They came halfway back to the ship. One guy that went in there took sick. I don't know what happened to him. Something -- some kind of -- he must have contracted something on his skin or his body. And in six months' time he was dead.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Sounds like you made the right decision.

JOHN SENNA - Yes. Yes. I say, well, I'm glad I didn't go in there, you know?

ANN MARIE LOPES - Mm-hmm.

JOHN SENNA - But it was a good experience for a young fellow. (inaudible) But then after I got older, I decided I wanted to quit the sea.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Right.

JOHN SENNA - So I did quit the sea. I quit the sea in 1960.

ANN MARIE LOPES - How old were you?

JOHN SENNA - At that time I was... what? 22, 23 years old.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK.

JOHN SENNA - And -- yeah. I was 22 years old. I decided to go to school, so I went to school here. I studied... I knew I had to get my high school diploma, and BCC was offering GED studies. So I went to BCC and I studied there. And I got my -- that's where I got my GED from. BCC. But then I wasn't satisfied. I said, "I've got to find -- I've got to get something better -- a trade." So I

started working in different plants as... I was very handy with tools and stuff like that. I was a maintenance man. So I did that for quite a bit -- quite a while. Different small plants. And learning the trade as I went along. But I wasn't satisfied; I -- something important. I wanted something better. So when the opportunity came to get into the plumbing trade, that's when I went into the Union, and I told them I wanted to get in to be a plumber. So, you know, that's when they told me they weren't accepting me, and all this and that, that's when I charged with them discrimination. And from then on I studied hard, very hard, because there was a lot to learn far as being a plumber, as far as the test was concerned. Especially the math, you know. But I put my mind to it. My wife was mad at the time: I used to come home, sit down and read my books. And read and write and write and write. And do my math, do my math. Just -- the formulas. I would write the formulas down, just to -- I couldn't remember all the formulas in my head. You know. And I'd put them down because when I -- you have to go for the test, it's all the -- you give me the problems -- you had to use the formula to solve the problem, and they'll tell you what you missed. So you had to know the formulas. So that's what I did. And I studied and studied, and I just whacked myself. And I went -- when it was time to go for, you know, my test, the first time I went I was like this here. I was nervous. I was real nervous, you know? I had no -- I just took the test. I failed it the first time. I got disgusted with myself. So I went back to school, and the teacher said, "Don't worry about it, John. The first time you went there you was nervous. You'll be all right." The second time I went -- it was nothing, it was a breeze. I just went right through it like nothing. And then, you have to be -- you have to work as a journeyman a whole year before you can go for your Master's. So what I did was, I worked, and I started studying again for my Master's. And it was much more intense than the journeyman's. So I just kept on studying. There was a good teacher up here at the vocational at the time, Mr. Burke -- John Burke. He was a plumbing inspector in New Bedford. And he's a teacher, nights at Voke. So I went to him, I told him, I said "I want to go for my Master's and I'm going to need some studying." And he says, "Fine. Come on in, I'll help you." So I went to his classes. And I studied for a whole year I went to one of his classes before I went to him. And then I told him, I said, "I'm going to go for my Master's -- it's coming up, I told him, at such and such a date." He says, "Good, John." So I went for my Master's, and I didn't make it. I says -- I went back to him, and I says, "Mr. Burke, I didn't make it." He says, "Don't worry about it, John." He says, "You're going to make it the next -- you'll do it next time." I went back the second time -- I made it. That's when I got my Master's license. Then I went on my own. And I went into my own plumbing business. And I stayed with that for quite awhile, and I did a lot of homes around here. I did a lot of new homes, and I did a lot of mill work, repairing steam lines in mills and so on and so forth. I did that. And I had a crew -- I had four men working for me. But then the recession hit in the eighties -- that real bad recession. And I knew I wouldn't get no work, so I

laid my men off. (inaudible) and all. I said, gee, I'm not getting no business. Nobody's working, so nobody's got any money. So I went and applied for the mill Pauldine's at the time. They needed a maintenance man.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Where?

**JOHN SENNA** - Pauldine's. That mill's gone now. I went up there and I applied for the job, and I got it. They needed a maintenance man with a plumber's license, and I fit the bill. So I stayed there and worked there for a whole year. But then the opportunity came to go into the house of correction as the head of the maintenance department in the Ash Street jail. In fact, Governor Michael Dukakis appointed me to that job. So I accepted it and I stayed there until I retired. It was a nice job. Nice job, you know? And I enjoyed it. I liked -- it was working with criminals. At that time there was a lot of young boys, young boys going to jail, but they weren't involved mostly in -- right now it's mostly all drugs. These here weren't drugs. They were stealing. But they were... in fact, I know how to weld. I used to weld. They brought me all new machines for welding there. And I had a young kid from Taunton -- he came into jail, and he wanted to learn. So I got him to work for me, and I taught him how to weld. And he was a good kid. And then this other boy came, and he was from New Bedford. He was doing carpentry work, but he didn't know how to read the rule. So I made a rule for him. I had a thing with all the measurements. I said, "you study it," and I told him how you do it -- "you study it. You measure." I told him the inch and one-eighths and the quarter-inch and three-eighths and so on and so forth, like that. And I taught him how to read the rule. And we had some carpentry work to be done, I told him, "you're going to be the foreman on the job," I told him. He said, "well, I don't know..." And I said, "I'm going to teach you." So I helped him out, and he did become a good carpenter.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - That's great.

**JOHN SENNA** - He left the -- he left the jail, and I saw him about three months ago. He said, "John, I'm running my own business now. Carpentry."

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Oh, nice.

**JOHN SENNA** - I says, thank God. I said, "Good. I'm glad." And he had a child that was very sick. "How's your little girl?" "John," he says, "She's all right now. She's getting married. I'm going to be a grandfather."

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Oh. (laughter)

JOHN SENNA - I says, "Good. Good." So he did all right. The one that became a welder -- I taught how to weld. He was getting out of jail -- I went down to the supply house where I used to get all my welding stuff. I was telling him about the young man. So he says, "I don't need anybody, John, but I know Crown Tanks in Taunton may need a welder, you know, spot welding, stuff like that." I says, "Yeah. Yeah," I said, "he can do that." So we lined him up with a job. He got the job, but -- and I haven't heard from him for a long time. And it was about two months ago I met one of the guys, telling me that he died.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, that's too bad.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. But he was a good kid. You know, I felt bad about it though, because he had two brothers -- the brothers were bad. You know, the brothers were real thieves.

ANN MARIE LOPES - What's that?

JOHN SENNA - They steal.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, thieves. Yeah.

JOHN SENNA - Thieves.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK.

JOHN SENNA - They used to go steal and call him to help them, and he'd get in trouble. You know?

ANN MARIE LOPES - Mm-hmm.

JOHN SENNA - I told him, I said, I told him, "Mike, you can't do that." "Well, John, it's my brothers." I said, "Yeah, but your brothers getting you in trouble all the time."

ANN MARIE LOPES - Right. And obviously he's not good at it because he keeps getting caught.

JOHN SENNA - Right, yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Can we go back to your grandfather?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Because we started with him. So when he came to the United States, what did he do here?

JOHN SENNA - He used to write all the letters, proxy letters, for men who were here, their wives there. And he'd write all the letters and notarized it. Because he had a notarization -- he had a stamp.

ANN MARIE LOPES - So he spoke English --

JOHN SENNA - Yes.

ANN MARIE LOPES - -- Portuguese and Creole?

JOHN SENNA - Both. Both. And he used to do a lot of work with the counselor here in New Bedford, which was Counselor Villealla, I think it was, the counselor at the time. And my grandfather did all the writing, because he was -- he was a smart man. And all of the writing for the immigrants that wanted to get married -- to women over there? They used to get married by proxy. You know, he'd write a letter --

ANN MARIE LOPES - Right.

JOHN SENNA - -- and that's --

ANN MARIE LOPES - So the woman would be in Cape Verde and the man would be here.

JOHN SENNA - Right, yeah. And that's what he did. And he did a whole lot. In fact, I've got a lot of his papers and stuff over there. I've got it in a box there, right underneath there on the side. It's a lot of his writings, all in Portuguese.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, nice. But --

JOHN SENNA - And I can't read Portuguese. (laughter)

ANN MARIE LOPES - But it's in his own hand.

JOHN SENNA - Beautiful hand.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yeah.

JOHN SENNA - You know? And calligraphy. And, yeah. So -- all his and his son was there, too. My Uncle Peter.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Now, what about your grandmother? Did she work outside of the house?

JOHN SENNA - No, no, she stayed home.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Took care of the kids?

JOHN SENNA - She was a -- she came from the old country and she was a homemaker. She stayed in the house. She didn't go no place. You know, she just did the shopping and the cooking, everything like that. You know, she had to -- she was bringing up her children. Because the youngest one, Alfred, he was a baby when they came to this country. You know? And my mother was only six years old.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, OK. And there were several others in there before, right? Yeah.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - So the grandparents, these are on your mother's side.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - So what about your father's side?

JOHN SENNA - My father's side... didn't know them too well. I knew them. Show you my baby picture right here.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, nice. You're going to let me copy that, right?

JOHN SENNA - Huh?



ANN MARIE LOPES - You're going to let me scan that, right? OK. We'll do this -- we'll do all the scanning. That's -- you're so cute.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Everybody had a little sailor's outfit.

JOHN SENNA - Years ago, yeah. That's when everybody had a sailor's outfit.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, nice.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - So back to your father's parents. Did they come here from Cape Verde?

JOHN SENNA - Yup.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK. What island were they on?

JOHN SENNA - Brava.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK.

JOHN SENNA - My father's parent... my father's father came here at the same time my mother's father came. They were friends. He became an American citizen in the United States in 1891.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK. And what's his name?

JOHN SENNA - João. I was named after him.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, OK. And...

JOHN SENNA - Senna.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK. This is your grandfather.

JOHN SENNA - It was my father's father.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yeah. So when he -- why did they come here? Do you know?

JOHN SENNA - Oh, because of the -- I guess better living conditions. Like anybody else that left the old country. And...

ANN MARIE LOPES - Was he married in Cape Verde?

JOHN SENNA - Yes.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK.

JOHN SENNA - Yes, he -- he had quite a few children, too. He had four boys and four girls, too. Eight children.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK. And where's your father in this group?

JOHN SENNA - Huh?

ANN MARIE LOPES - Where's your father?

JOHN SENNA - He died.

ANN MARIE LOPES - No, no -- is he the oldest, or the youngest --?

JOHN SENNA - No, he was -- I'd say he was... let's see, one, two --

ANN MARIE LOPES - Do you know their name?

JOHN SENNA - The third one. There was Manuel, Joseph, my father's name was August, and Raymond.

ANN MARIE LOPES - And the girls?

JOHN SENNA - The girls -- yeah. The girls' names were -- one was Charlotte, Benvinda, and the other one -- I forgot her name. She lives in Boston, I just called her TiTia, but...

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK.

JOHN SENNA - Benvinda, Charlotte, Carlotta... Jeannine.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Say that again for me?

JOHN SENNA - Jeannine.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, OK.

JOHN SENNA - That's it.

ANN MARIE LOPES - So your grandmother and grandfather were there. Was your mother born there or was she born here?

JOHN SENNA - My mother was born there.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK.

JOHN SENNA - My mother came here when she was six years old.

ANN MARIE LOPES - That's right, you told me that. So what did your mother's mother do? Was she at home too?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK. Do you know where they lived?

JOHN SENNA - My mother?

ANN MARIE LOPES - Well -- yeah.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. They lived on -- well, when they first come from the old country, they lived on Madison Street.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Madison Street's a popular street. Did they live in the same house as your father's family?

JOHN SENNA - No, no. Hm-mmm. That's where my grandfather bought a home after that. After they settled on Madison Street, they bought a home on Acushnet Avenue, 234. That's where I was born.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Now, is that how your mother and father met?

JOHN SENNA - I think they met -- yeah. They met here in the United States.

ANN MARIE LOPES - But how?

JOHN SENNA - I have no idea. You know, you just -- I guess to our... see, my grandfather was well-known, and a lot of the young men used to come home and pay homage to him. You know, hello, and, you know, greet the family all the time. I guess that's maybe the way he met my mother. Because she was a young girl then, too, at this time.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Was there an age difference?

JOHN SENNA - I think there is. Because, you see, my father died when he was 86. My mother was... she would have been 84, about two years' difference. That's about all there was.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Do you know what they did for fun?

JOHN SENNA - No.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK. Growing up, what did your father do? Did he have any jobs, first of all, when he was in school?

JOHN SENNA - Well, he was -- he worked on the -- he was -- he worked on coal boats. Coal colliers.

ANN MARIE LOPES - So he went out on the boat?

JOHN SENNA - He went out on the boat. Yeah. On board, you know, because he used to bring the coal into New Bedford from -- he used to come from Norfolk, Virginia, to New Bedford on the coal ships. He used to bring it to the gas company. That's when the gas company was burning coal. That's what it... yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - How long did he do this?

JOHN SENNA - I guess he did that for quite awhile, until the company developed. Then he went out to work for Standard Oil during the war years, and he was torpedoed twice.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, wow. So he -- on Standard Oil, he was on a boat.

JOHN SENNA - On the ships, yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Wow. And where was he torpedoed?

JOHN SENNA - Off the coast of French Guiana, in South America.

ANN MARIE LOPES - What happened?

JOHN SENNA - German U-boats torpedoed them.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Even though they weren't a war ship. They weren't in...

JOHN SENNA - Well, you know, then, if you were a merchant marine, you were carrying cargo for the war effort. So anything that was at sea, the German U-boats would torpedo them.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Right. And the merchant marines had no way to defend themselves.

JOHN SENNA - At that time, no.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Mm-hmm.

JOHN SENNA - And what happened was, they were going south down there, they got torpedoed by the U-boat. They were in -- they got into the lifeboat. They were five days in the water, in the lifeboat, they rowed, and they finally got to the beach in French Guiana. And that's where the authorities got them and brought them back. And they put them on another ship in French Guiana. Coming back to the United States, they got torpedoed again.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Sheesh.

JOHN SENNA - So they were out in the water again for another five or six days, then they got picked up and they came back home. That's when he told my wife -- told my mother he was not going to go to sea no more.

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter) I would -- I wouldn't go either.

JOHN SENNA - But then, uh, either go to sea or go into service. He went back out to sea again.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh. Rather than go into the service.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. He was -- well, he was a cook, anyways, you know? A chef. And they went back as head steward on the company then. So he became an officer on the merchant marine. Which was, of course, that's all he knew, was shipping. That's all he did all his life until he retired. Then he died. But I never got along with my father. He used to beat me too much. He was partly -- he had a lot of Sicilian in him. My grand--his father was from Sicily. He immigrated to the Cape Verde Islands. That's where my father was born. But he had that mean temper. That mean old-country temper. Even my father had it. I used to come home and get -- I used to go hide. Because he'd question me about doing this, but I didn't do it. And, whack! You know? So I never did... I never did like my father at all.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Did he do this to everybody? All the boys?

JOHN SENNA - Just me.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh.

JOHN SENNA - I was the only boy. And he used to take it out on me. And he never hit my sisters, but he always hit me.

ANN MARIE LOPES - So how many kids in your family? You --

JOHN SENNA - Four.

ANN MARIE LOPES - So, and --

JOHN SENNA - Me and I have three sisters.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Where are you in line?

JOHN SENNA - I'm the oldest.

ANN MARIE LOPES - You're the oldest. OK. And then your sisters...?

JOHN SENNA - My sister Dolores is next to me, and my sister Mary's number three, and my sister Audrey is the youngest -- she's ten years younger than I am.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, so he treated you differently.

JOHN SENNA - Oh, he sure did. Oh, yeah. I'd never -- And then I literally was against it, because he wouldn't help the family out at all. You know. And I remember one time my mother was there, he -- it was during the Depression time, and my mother had a job for pennies. At that time, pennies was worth a lot of money. And she was going to buy us shoes. He came home, feeling good one day, took that jar, went out, and drank it all up. So. And I was, you know, I was -- I

knew when I was a young boy... we were kids, but I knew the value of it. And I never respected him after that. That's why I never respected my father.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Did your mother work outside the home?

**JOHN SENNA** - Yes.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Where did she work?

**JOHN SENNA** - Stitching. Yeah. I think it was at sweat shops. That's all she ever did, was sweat shops. But she was good, though. She knew how to crochet, stitch, make clothes. She used to sew all my pants and my stuff like that. You know, shorten my pants and everything like that. And she used to crochet and knit and all that. She used to make all my sweaters. I never bought a sweater. You know? Sleeveless sweaters, long-sleeved -- she got me all my sweaters for the wintertime. My sister -- well, I've got one sister that does the same thing. But the others -- the two oldest is adult. They were too busy with school. I have one sister that's -- she was in accounting. She became an accountant. She's good. And my oldest sister that was next to me, finished her school and went to work. And she got a good job with an employment office until she retired -- she got sick. She had to leave the job. But they all did well. You know. They all did.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - So your mom -- did she have any fun? Did she belong to clubs? Did she do anything to, you know, to relax? Did she have music? Did she have parties?

**JOHN SENNA** - No, she... the only party I remember ever having in the house was, you know, Christmastime and stuff like that. It was a family gathering. My uncles used to come in from Connecticut with his family, and everything was centered around my grandfather and grandmother. They were the cook. The big turkey and the plates on the table. My grandfather always sat at the head of the table. And he'd make the toast. And then after that we'd sit down there, and all of the families sat down there and ate. All the children had their own table on the side. Grandchildren. And we all -- and this was very traditional. Every Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, everybody sat around the table. And...

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Did you have any Cape Verdean food?

**JOHN SENNA** - Oh, yeah.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Like what?

**JOHN SENNA** - Well, my grandmother used to make -- see that? See that there, that stuff there? I make that as [chow-chow?]. It's called sweet relish in English. My grandma used to make that. And my mother used to make it, that's how I learned to make it. I used to watch her. And it's made out of green tomato, red peppers, and onions, and vinegar, and brown sugar. That's how you get the brownness. And you grind all that stuff up, and you put it in a kettle, and you cook -- put vinegar in there. And you cook it for about three or four hours. At the end of the cooking they're all blended together, and you bottle it. It's called chow-chow. But there's a lot of Cape Verdean dishes -- like **xerem**. **Xerem** is made out of corn. It looks like -- almost like you make

jag, but, you know, there's no rice in there. It's just corn, beans, kales, and a little bit of pork meat. Very little. And beef. And you just cook it like that and eat that like that. It's an old Cape Verdean dish. And...

ANN MARIE LOPES - So did your grandmother do most of the cooking?

JOHN SENNA - My grandmother did all the cooking.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, OK. Because your mom was out working all day?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. Yeah. But... my mother used to make the best chicken -- you'd call it chicken stew, but I call it *galinha guizado*. Best chicken -- in the world I haven't tasted, you know, I've never tasted (laughter) better yet. But my sister, Dolores, she learned how to cook from my mother, and she's a good cook. And she does a lot of the Cape Verdean dishes. She makes *gufong*, *pastelle*, *xerem*, *munchupa* -- all the Cape Verdean, old Cape Verdean dishes, she makes. And I've been learning how to do it, too.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Now you're learning how to do it.

JOHN SENNA - Yup. I do -- I've tried the *gufong*, but my *gufong* don't come out too good.

ANN MARIE LOPES - That's one of things you've got to be very... you've got to get it just right.

JOHN SENNA - Get it just right. Yeah. But I will -- I'll get to it. I'll get to it, you know. Try and try, and, you know.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Because if you don't get it right, ohh.

JOHN SENNA - Forget it.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yeah, it's really bad.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah, and so she told me how to do it, and how it was easy. And it's very easy, you know, but it's how you mix it, with your hand, and roll it. And then -- right. And another thing we make -- I make it too, now, is -- it's called [*roli*?]. You make -- when you make a stew, instead of putting a dumpling in, you put this *roli* in. It's cornmeal. And you roll it up, or roll it up in a ball, put it in there, and let it cook in there. And it steams with the stew or whatever you want. Chicken. And it's delicious.

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter) Did you all eat together?

JOHN SENNA - Always.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Always?

JOHN SENNA - At home.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Mm-hmm. Everybody's at the table?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. Always -- always. Everybody sat down at one time. Unless -- like, when I got older and I'd start working, when I was a young kid, I used to come home late, and my mother would have my meal all ready for me, and I would sit down and eat. And then my sisters would be doing something. But my mother did everything. She did the cooking... I mean, she was a wonderful cook. My sisters... they were -- my sisters were always learning how to do everything,

because she knows more about my father's family than I do. Because my mother – she and my mother sit down all day long and talk. My mother would tell them everything, you know, on both sides of the family. And so if I wanted to know something, I'd go ask her, because she knows everything, you know. Which is good.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yeah, it's great.

JOHN SENNA - You know. Because... my other sister, Mary, she was too busy with school. So she didn't bother getting to know. But she doesn't even -- she don't speak the language as good as I do and my sister Dolores does. 'Cause she never bothers about it.

ANN MARIE LOPES - How did you learn to speak?

JOHN SENNA - From my grandfather and grandmother.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK.

JOHN SENNA - I grew up with them.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Because they only -- that's what they spoke? They only spoke that?

JOHN SENNA - That's all they spoke in the house, was the Cape Verdean islands' Creole.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yup. Did you know English when you went to school?

JOHN SENNA - No.

ANN MARIE LOPES - You just went to school?

JOHN SENNA - I went to school. I learned to speak English at school. And that's all we spoke, was Cape Verdean, at home. And I didn't always. Like Fudgie. My name was João, but I used to write John. So I went to school and they told me I had to write João. And Fudgie and Popsicle used to make fun of me. "Joh-oh! Joh-oh!"

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter)

JOHN SENNA - Boy, did I used to get mad. (laughter) I told them we were going to fight.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Did you have a nickname?

JOHN SENNA - John, that's all.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK. Because, you know, "Fudgie" and "Popsicle".

JOHN SENNA - Yeah, I know. They're the only ones on that block that had that nickname, "Fudgie" and "Popsicle". I don't know how come -- how they got it. That's all I ever knew them by.

ANN MARIE LOPES - So what was the neighborhood like? Can you just tell me what it -- close your eyes and imagine that you're back in the neighborhood, and can you tell me what it was like?

JOHN SENNA - Oh, the neighborhood was beautiful. On the corner just before Russell Street, above Russell Street, was Joe Antunes' store. And right next door, set in further, was this Jewish family. The old man used to have a horse and buggy wagon in back in his barn. Every day he used to go out with his horse and go and call "Rags". Like, "rags, rags," you know. And that

was -- I'll never forget that. I'll always remember him, you know, on that horse, sitting up there and hollering "rags" in the... And the next house was the Pinas, and that's where Fudgsicle and Popsicle lived. And then the Pinas, they lived upstairs, and then -- no, they lived downstairs. The Pinas lived upstairs. And then after there was the... The Barbozas. Yes. The Barbozas were next door. That was -- Ida Barboza, John Barboza, and Jean Barboza. Then, just before that, at the head of the -- was the Gomeses. They lived right next door to me, next to the Barbozas. And then on this side here was Cesar Duarte and his family. His grandmother, his mother, and his father. And they lived there. There was supposed to be a storefront there, but there was no store there. And then -- I forget who lived there. But then the next street, the next house, was Guy Oliviera and his mother. And after that it was -- you were onto Madison Street. And across the street was where the school was, at the time. T.A.Green School.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Right.

**JOHN SENNA** - And then next to it there was a little house there. And then next door was the Pinas, where the Bomb Shelter was.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - OK. So the Pinas lived upstairs and the Bomb Shelter was downstairs?

**JOHN SENNA** - Downstairs.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Did the Pinas build the bomb shelter?

**JOHN SENNA** - No, it was always there.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Huh.

**JOHN SENNA** - The Bomb Shelter, or -- well, they owned it up, Pina -- it was Nene, Nene and Yoyo. Nene was a Pina and Yoyo was a... Silvia? I forget his last name. I know him good, too. And they were over here. They opened up the Bomb Shelter. But then didn't have the money to open up the Bomb Shelter. My uncle financed them. Yeah, he financed them to open up the bomb shelter. The did. And then after that, their house, and that was -- the Ramoses next door to the Bomb Shelter, the big house, was the Ramoses' house. And I'll never forget Joe Ramos. I knew him. He used to tell me that house was haunted. (laughter)

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - (laughter)

**JOHN SENNA** - He says, "Look, kid --" I was a little kid -- "I hear all kinds of noise in that house. It's a haunted house." That's what he said. He said you know. And then after that house was an empty lot. A big empty lot. It was just a -- it is the tot lot now? And when I was a little kid it was empty. And then next to that there was that little cottage there... I forget who lived there. I don't remember who lived there. I remember the next one over, and then two houses down, was the Texeiras. That's where Bella Texeira. That's where they lived.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - She's now Bella Livramento?

**JOHN SENNA** - Right.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - OK.



JOHN SENNA - And she lived there for – her and her sisters and her family lived in that house for a long time. That’s where she grew up. And then my aunt and uncle lived in the corner house, which is an empty lot there now. There used to be a home there. It burned up. And that’s where they lived. That was the entire -- that whole block.

ANN MARIE LOPES - So that was your life.

JOHN SENNA - That was my life, yes.

ANN MARIE LOPES - That was your life until you went into the merchant marines.

JOHN SENNA - Until we moved away from there.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, OK.

JOHN SENNA - 1939.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK.

JOHN SENNA - We moved up to Purchase Street, because they tore these houses down, you know?

ANN MARIE LOPES - Were you affected by the hurricane in '38?

JOHN SENNA - No, we -- I remember it. I was there, watching it -- watching the water come up.

But the water didn’t come up to Acushnet Avenue. The water came up as far as 2<sup>nd</sup> Street.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. It came up -- all of that whole area was flooded. And in fact, I came out of school that day, the wind was blowing hard. I didn’t -- you know, I was only a child, I was only six or seven years old, and I didn’t know about what a – it just was windy and raining. So I came in the house. But at that time, we didn’t -- I don’t think people knew -- didn’t think it was a hurricane. Because we didn’t have the forecasts at the time. And it got worse. And my... I’ll never forget that. My grandmother was worried. She was nervous. And the wind was blowing. You could hear the wind howling around. There was a big, big oak tree between my house and the Barbozas’ house, that came down and went right into that lot.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh. It was lucky it went into the house and didn’t hit your house.

JOHN SENNA - And my grandmother was screaming. She was calling my grandfather, “We’ve got to --” My grandfather’s sitting up in the attic... no, where was he? He was sitting in the attic... he was down... yeah, up in the attic. Smoking his pipe. Not worried about nothing. Nothing. He’d listen to the wind blowing, rain, and I went up in the attic and I could see the water -- water -- the whole street, down -- I could see right down to 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, you know, and all the way down -- further down. And there was water all over the place. So -- we used to call him Pa João. I said “Pa João! The water coming.” “What, what water?” He says, “Sinta, don’t worry about it.” You know. And smoke his pipe. (laughter)

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter)

JOHN SENNA - He didn’t worry about nothing. Just smoking his pipe. He knew -- he knew what it was. You know? So I sat with him. My grandmother’s screaming at him. “Well, we’ve got to get

out! What are we going to do? What are we going to do?" She's worried -- you know how a woman -- she's all hopped up. He told her, "Be quiet." So it was... and then the storm blew over, when we went outside, all these trees were down and all the wires were down... that time everything was on poles. All the poles were down, everything like that. No power to the house and all of that. The water would -- you know, you had to boil your water and all that. I said, oh, boy. It was exciting, you know. It did a lot of damage. As a young child, you didn't worry about the damage, you know. It wasn't...

ANN MARIE LOPES - It was fun, because it was new and exciting.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. So it was good.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Did you ever go uptown at all?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - I used to go uptown -- especially in the summertime, the summer cars. Did you ever see the trolley cars? You ever been to New Hampshire?

JOHN SENNA - Hm-mmm.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Up in Lowell, Mass.? Have you ever been to Lowell, Mass.?

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yup.

JOHN SENNA - You ever -- in the summertime?

ANN MARIE LOPES - Hm-mmm.

JOHN SENNA - You ever see the trolley car that they have that runs from one section of the town to the historical area?

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yup.

JOHN SENNA - An open-car?

ANN MARIE LOPES - Mm-hmm.

JOHN SENNA - That's what we had in New Bedford in the summertime.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK. So you used to ride the trolley uptown.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. And when you'd get on the trolley, it would only cost you a token. In fact, I think I might have one of those tokens here. I think she has it.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Wow.

JOHN SENNA - And I haven't seen it for a long time, it's still here someplace. And you had a token, and you'd give the conductor the token, and you'd ride the trolley car.

ANN MARIE LOPES - So what would you do uptown?

JOHN SENNA - Well, go shopping. You know, I'd go with my mother or something like that, or my uncle.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Where?

JOHN SENNA - Well, especially, like, if you'd go to buy a pair of shoes. Self-service. It used to be on the corner of William and Acushnet Avenue. That's where the self-service shoe was. You'd go

buy a pair of shoes, and you'd buy a pair of boots. That's where the thing -- that's where it was in those days. You had a pair of boots. The boots would come up and tie here. They had a side pocket to put a little small knife there, because you carried a little pocket knife -- put it on the side of the boots.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Why did you carry a pocket knife?

JOHN SENNA - Because if you wanted to cut an apple or anything like that. So fruit, anything like that and just peel it. And that's... and to sharpen this and that. And then when I got older, we used to hook the streetcars. Hook onto the back of the streetcars. (laughter)

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter) Well, who needs a token?

JOHN SENNA - That's right.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Who needs a token?

JOHN SENNA - I guess all the kids -- all the kids did that. It was part of your growing up. Being in mischief. But nothing serious. But you want to stop the streetcar and then pull the cord down -- electric cord -- so your car would stop automatically. (laughter)

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, it didn't send a signal to the driver?

JOHN SENNA - No, you'd just pull the cord down and it would stop it.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, so I bet you kept -- (laughter)

JOHN SENNA - (laughter)

ANN MARIE LOPES - I can see you pushing -- pulling the cord a couple of times.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. Pull the cord down and get off the streetcar.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yeah. And I bet the man got mad.

JOHN SENNA - Oh, boy.

ANN MARIE LOPES - The man driving it would get mad.

JOHN SENNA - I got caught once.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Mm-hmm?

JOHN SENNA - He picked me up and wrang me by my neck like that. Put me right in the car. I said, oh, boy, I'm in trouble now. And sitting in the seat right there was a good friend of my uncle's. I looked. He went like this here. I said, oh, boy, am I in trouble. So he went up to the next block. Good thing. He says, "You going to do this anymore?" I said, "No, no, no." He said, "OK," you know, "go ahead." He let me out. I said, oh, boy. I know I'm going to be in trouble when I get home. (laughter) And I was in trouble, too.

ANN MARIE LOPES - And you didn't tell your -- you didn't tell the people at home.

JOHN SENNA - Of course not.

ANN MARIE LOPES - They knew.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. They knew.

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter) They knew. That amazes me, how --

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. Well, that was good -- what was nice about that neighborhood when we were children: if you did something wrong but in the street, and those people knew your family, you knew it was going to go home to your house and you were going to get reprimanded for that, what you were doing. But that's what made it so good. Because you respected that person. Because he knew your family, and you did something wrong, you had to tell them "I'm sorry" or this and that or this. Because they wanted to -- they knew. But you don't have that respect today.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yeah. That's true.

JOHN SENNA - You don't have that respect of children today.

ANN MARIE LOPES - When you were a little boy, did you have jobs?

JOHN SENNA - Yes, when I was growing up. I was -- we moved up onto Purchase Street, I was -- next door to my house was Dr. (**Lagowitz?**). And I used to sweep their sidewalk every day, and I used to get 25 cents a week.

ANN MARIE LOPES - A week.

JOHN SENNA - Just to sweep the sidewalk. And that was a lot of money, 25 cents.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yeah, but a week?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. How long would it take you to sweep a sidewalk, two seconds? (laughter)

ANN MARIE LOPES - That's -- then you could get your penny candy. (laughter)

JOHN SENNA - Yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - What else did you do?

JOHN SENNA - And I delivered the Standard Times -- when I got a little older, I used to deliver the Standard Times. I used to deliver all down 6<sup>th</sup> Street here, Bedford Street, and County Street between Wing and Bedford Street. I delivered there. That was my route... then I got another route. I used to go from... where did I go? From Bedford Street up to Arch Street. I did those houses all around there. It was good. You know, it was cold in the winter. We didn't make much money, but you made enough money to -- I used to give all the money to my mother, you know. And then I used to shine shoes -- go shining shoes. In fact, I still have my shoe-shining box downstairs.

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter)

JOHN SENNA - And I'd go shine shoes every Saturday afternoon or Sunday mornings, go around shining shoes. Go hit the -- most of the clubs and bars. At that time it was the fishermen and servicemen, and you shined their shoes. You'd get -- I don't know, at that time I think it was ten cents for shining shoes. Which...

ANN MARIE LOPES - That's pretty good money.

JOHN SENNA - At that time, yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - That's pretty good -- that's pretty good money.

JOHN SENNA - Five cents, ten cents, nickel and dime. And so one time, I made two dollars.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Wow.

JOHN SENNA - On a Sunday I made two dollars shining shoes. Boy. I came home and told my mother, "I made two dollars." She says, "What?" It was -- wow, that's a lot of money. And I gave her the money, and she gave me fifty cents, and I went to the movies. Fifty cents. I bought candy, ice cream, and went to the movies.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, jeez. Can't do that now.

JOHN SENNA - No. (laughter)

ANN MARIE LOPES - Fifty cents. So where did you go to the movies?

JOHN SENNA - I went to the Empire Theater or the Olympia Theater or the New Bedford Hotel -- the New Bedford Theater.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Where was --

JOHN SENNA - Usually mostly the Empire Theater.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Where was the Empire?

JOHN SENNA - Right on Elm Street.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK. Near --

JOHN SENNA - Do you know where the other big theater is? No, I don't think you'd remember that.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Uh-uh.

JOHN SENNA - It was before your time. It was on Elm Street, right up the street. The Empire Theater.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Near where the parking lot is now?

JOHN SENNA - Between, let's see, Pleasant and Purchase.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yeah. Yeah. The Bank of America's there. It's across from the post office, diagonally across from the post office.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. Right down the street, yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yeah. Down the street from the bus station.

JOHN SENNA - Right.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yeah. OK. And so what -- you got to see movies. How old were you when you started doing that?

JOHN SENNA - When I started going to the movies? Ten years old.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, OK. Did you go with friends?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - With the guys that you mentioned?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. Like, we used to go with Henry, Jr. and Ricky and Hector Barros.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, OK. My cousins.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah, and the other kid across the -- Norma Martin, and the Martins, and we used to go to the movies together. Johnny Lundy, and, you know, all the kids in the neighborhood, we used to go to the movies. Or we'd go to movies down in the South End on a Friday night, and they had their chapters.

ANN MARIE LOPES - What are the chapters?

JOHN SENNA - The chapters were a continuation of Captain Marvel... who else was it? Superman, and stuff like that. You know. You'd see the -- you'd see the picture, and you had two pictures, and you had the chapter.

ANN MARIE LOPES - So you could -- that was clever, that you'd keep going back. What theater was this one?

JOHN SENNA - The Orpheum Theater.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK. They're trying to restore that.

JOHN SENNA - I know they are. It's a beautiful theater. Have you ever been inside?

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yes.

JOHN SENNA - They got bad -- they've got a beautiful hall there, too.

ANN MARIE LOPES - On the second floor.

JOHN SENNA - Dance hall, yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Did you go to the dances there?

JOHN SENNA - No. I've been there, but I didn't go to dances there.

ANN MARIE LOPES - That's in great shape.

JOHN SENNA - It is. It is, still. Yeah?

ANN MARIE LOPES - Still. The theater downstairs is not in great shape.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Everything's there -- you know, the ticket booth and the seats and all of that, and the stage is beautiful, but it's all peeling and that kind of stuff. Because --

JOHN SENNA - That's all that dampness.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yeah.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - And it's old.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah, and it's -- it's a beautiful place. I hope they can restore it. They should.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Well, they're trying hard.

JOHN SENNA - They're trying hard.

ANN MARIE LOPES - They're -- you know.

JOHN SENNA - It's going to take a lot of money.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yeah. That's the part that's not good.

JOHN SENNA - That's what it is, yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - So you went to T.A. Green School, I would assume.

JOHN SENNA - Yup.

ANN MARIE LOPES - And then did you go to the Woods School?

JOHN SENNA - Oh, here, yeah. The Woods School.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yeah. And then you went into the merchant marines, and --?

JOHN SENNA - No, from there I went to the Donaghy School. Because in here, I wasn't paying attention to the school when I was -- I was skipping school all the time.

ANN MARIE LOPES - At the Woods School.

JOHN SENNA - So they sent us down to the Donaghy School for the workshop that they had there, to learn a trade.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, OK.

JOHN SENNA - So I went there, and that's where I quit, from there.

ANN MARIE LOPES - And then went into the merchant marines?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Did you date? What did you do with your dates? Where did you take your dates?

JOHN SENNA - The movies. In fact, we went to -- we'd go to see the movies at either the Olympia or the Empire, or the State Theater.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yeah. Did you ever go to the State Theater when they had the band, and the band would come up or down from...?

JOHN SENNA - No, no. That was just before my time.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK. Did you go dancing?

JOHN SENNA - Not really.

ANN MARIE LOPES - No? You're not a dancer?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. I wasn't -- I learned how to dance when I got older. But when I was a young kid, I wasn't interested in dancing.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Right. So eventually you went to the Bomb Shelter, I'm assuming, because it's right -- it was right in walking distance.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. Right.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Did you go to other halls?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. I liked the Bomb Shelter at that time. You know.

ANN MARIE LOPES - That's a small club.

JOHN SENNA - Whew. (laughter)

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter)

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. Anybody real tall had trouble. (laughter)

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter) Well, it was underground.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah, it was underground. That's why they called it the Bomb Shelter.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Mm-hmm. It was sound-proof?

JOHN SENNA - No, not really.

ANN MARIE LOPES - No?

JOHN SENNA - You could hear everything right half the time, yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter) What about the Verdean Hall?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah, I've been there. Yeah, I used to go there all the time.

ANN MARIE LOPES - I've heard other people have mentioned, like, the Monte Pio.

JOHN SENNA - The Monte Pio was on the corner -- it was on Acushnet Avenue, where Howland Street... not Howland Street -- do you know where, yeah. Where Wing Street ends? And you've got that -- that's Howland Street. You go all the way down. Monte Pio's right on that corner.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Could you go to Monte's playground and play?

JOHN SENNA - Oh, yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, you could?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - At -- you had to reach a certain age.

JOHN SENNA - I didn't know, but I could walk -- I wasn't allowed to go there all the time. But we used to sneak down there and go play down there.

ANN MARIE LOPES - You play sports?

JOHN SENNA - Basketball, baseball. At that time, baseball was a big thing. Football was another big thing. I loved football.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Where'd you play football?

JOHN SENNA - Right there.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Monte's playground?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh. I can't imagine it.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. There were a lot of bumps. (laughter)

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter) I would think. It's all cement. Was it cement then?

JOHN SENNA - No, it was all dirt then.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, OK. All right, that makes it a little easier.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah, well, you filled up with a lot of bumps and a lot of hurts and scrapes and all. But that's part of growing up.



ANN MARIE LOPES - Yup.

JOHN SENNA - You know? That's why you enjoy it.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Now, you've seen -- you've traveled all over the place. But you came back.

JOHN SENNA - Yup.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Why?

JOHN SENNA - I guess because my family was here. That's the only reason why I came back to New Bedford. That in itself. And that's the only reason why I came back to New Bedford. And once I got back here, New Bedford is changing now. I think it's getting better than it was twenty years ago, thirty years ago. I can see a future for young people in this city, whereas the reason I went to sea -- and a lot of the guys that were my age and older -- all went to sea because there was nothing here in New Bedford for them, unless you want to work at the cotton mill. And I knew I couldn't work in the cotton mill. I went to work in the mill one day. One day. I walked in, I walked out, I said, "That's it." (laughter)

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter) It wasn't for you.

JOHN SENNA - No.

ANN MARIE LOPES - It wasn't for you.

JOHN SENNA - No, I wouldn't -- and so I went to sea. Because you have your independence out there, you know? You know how to work, you know how to do it, and you're independent.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Well, and it's in your blood, because your grandfather was a whaler and your uncles were in the merchant marines, your father...

JOHN SENNA - Yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - It was all -- in was in your blood.

JOHN SENNA - They all went to sea. My whole family went to sea, except my uncle John. He became a chef. He bought -- there was a restaurant on 226 Union Street, the upstairs, which was called the Waite Restaurant.

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter)

JOHN SENNA - The Waite Restaurant. He owned it. And then I don't know what happened. It closed up after awhile.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Interesting name. Do you know where it came from?

JOHN SENNA - No, I don't.

ANN MARIE LOPES - It's like "wait." Did you have to wait for --

JOHN SENNA - I guess so. (laughter)

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter) You had to wait for the food?

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. And, in fact, I've got the letters right there, where -- for notarization, where they had it notarized, you know, for the lease and all that stuff. You know. And...

ANN MARIE LOPES - But everybody else -- were they merchant marines for the most part?

**JOHN SENNA** - My uncle went out to sea just for about maybe a month to a year. And he quit and never went back out again no more. My other uncles never did. My uncle Joseph, he went in the service, he didn't go in the merchant marine at all. Alfred went into the merchant marine, but he quit and went back -- he went to work over at Goodyear. But my father's side, they all went to sea.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - OK. As merchant marines?

**JOHN SENNA** - Yup. In fact, one of his brothers went back to the old country in 19... I think it was 1940. Because we'd already moved to Purchase Street. 1940. And I think it was Joe -- his name was Joe. Joe... I think it was Joe. He went back to the old country, and he lived there, but then when they had the starvation -- starving, you know, in 1942, it -- excuse me. Him and quite a few other Cape Verdean men decided to come back to the States, because they couldn't get food there, nothing like that. Things were hard. So they got a boat, they fixed it, and they were going to sail back to the United States. Well, they never made it. They all died at sea.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Oh, boy.

**JOHN SENNA** - They said somehow, something happened to the ship. They sunk.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Ohh.

**JOHN SENNA** - And they all died. That was in 1942. Because they told me about it. My mother told me that they all tried to come back to this country in order to get work and get money and get their families back here, but they never made it.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Now, I know that you met your wife at the beach --

**JOHN SENNA** - Yeah.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - -- from another interview. Could you tell me that story?

**JOHN SENNA** - Well, I was -- I was hanging around with a friend of mine, Izzy Barboza -- he was a friend of mine. And he was down the beach, and I told him I'd be down. So I went down and met them down at the beach. And I seen him -- I didn't see her. I seen this other girl, and I was looking at her, and he saw me, and he says, "John, we're going to go to the mystery ride with the Verdean Vets." And so, "yeah," I said, (inaudible) -- "No, no, I can fix you up with this girl right here." Which was her. I said, "OK."

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - "Her" being your wife.

**JOHN SENNA** - Yeah. So he introduced me to her, and I sat down with her on the beach and we started talking during that time, and I asked her if she wanted to go. And she says, "Yeah." I says, "Well," I says, "good. I'll pick you up." So that night, I came home, ate supper, and got dressed. I picked up -- I picked her up. And I picked up Izzy and his wife, Tanya... were they married at that time? I think he was married. And picked him up. And -- "Where are we going?" I says, "No. It's a mystery ride." So we went to the Vets -- at that time, the Vets was still

on Purchase Street. And we just followed them all out to Dartmouth, a place called -- named the Fireside.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Hmm. OK.

JOHN SENNA - And that's where the mystery ride was. And...

ANN MARIE LOPES - What is a mystery ride?

JOHN SENNA - Well, you don't know where you're going.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, OK. OK.

JOHN SENNA - That's what it was.

ANN MARIE LOPES - And then you -- so you follow somebody.

JOHN SENNA - You follow -- we followed them, and then...

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK.

JOHN SENNA - And got there, and it was nice. It was a beautiful club, you know? And they had everything there. Food, liquor, and there was food and dancing. And it was nice. And that's when I met her, and that's where we started. And then after that, I told her, I said, "Well, we had a nice time." I said, "We'll have to do it again." So I kept... But she wasn't too interested in me at the time.

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter)

JOHN SENNA - I don't think so. But I guess I grew on her. So I kept going to her and taking her here and there, and Izzy and I and Tanya, we'd go out she'd go with us -- I'd call her to go with us, and like that. We went to New Hampshire; she went with us. And it was -- it got better and better as the years (laughter) -- as time went on. And we stayed together. And then she told me, she said, "Well, we're going out, what do you want to do?" I said, "Well, I guess we're going to get married."

ANN MARIE LOPES - That was your proposal.

JOHN SENNA - Yup.

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter)

JOHN SENNA - (laughter) I went out and bought her a ring. She went -- in fact, she went out with me and tried the ring on. And she'd come in -- she was proud to come down and show it to everybody. Her father and her sisters and all her friends. And after that...

F1: Never heard you talk so much.

JOHN SENNA - What?

ANN MARIE LOPES - She said she'd never heard you talk so much. (laughter)

F1: I told her I had never heard you talk so much.

ANN MARIE LOPES - (laughter)

JOHN SENNA - (laughter) That's true. I don't talk much.

ANN MARIE LOPES - You're not a talker.

JOHN SENNA - Not a talker. And she... and so I just kept going, and we got married, right here, downstairs. And...

ANN MARIE LOPES - In this house?

JOHN SENNA - Yup.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, OK.

JOHN SENNA - Yup. In fact, her and I started living here, and I started working on the house. I fixed the porch - put a new porch back there - the porch was falling apart; I took that down and put a new one up. And I took that down and I put a big deck out there and all of that stuff, and repaired the roof. You know, at that time, I knew how to do all that stuff. So I had did that you know.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Were you involved with the church at all?

JOHN SENNA - No, not that much.

ANN MARIE LOPES - OK.

JOHN SENNA - I'm... I did get involved with church after awhile.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Our Lady of the Assumption?

JOHN SENNA - Oh, all the way, yeah. I'm -- and I'm a member of the Knights of Columbus. I'm a Fourth Degree.

ANN MARIE LOPES - What does that mean?

JOHN SENNA - One of the highest awards you can get, until the -- the next award would be... would be bestowed upon you either by a cardinal or the Pope. But I'm two steps below that.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, that's not bad.

JOHN SENNA - No.

ANN MARIE LOPES - That's good.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. So I can... I can wear a cape, hat, sword, and all that. But I don't... But I haven't participated in the Knights of Columbus in years. I'm still a member; I just don't... you know, never cared to participate in that. Like, I found that it was mostly the... was, at the time, in New Bedford, was the Irish.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Really.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. And I found that a lot of it, even though it's Catholic religion -- Catholic men, there was a lot of discrimination.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, that's too bad. Kind of like what you ran up against when you became a plumber.

JOHN SENNA - Pardon?

ANN MARIE LOPES - Kind of like what you came up against when you wanted to be --

JOHN SENNA - A plumber?

ANN MARIE LOPES - Part of the union, yeah.

JOHN SENNA - Well, they didn't want to let me in. They didn't want me to become a plumber.

When I wanted to become a plumber, they didn't want to let me in, because he said that I was too old.

ANN MARIE LOPES - How old were you?

JOHN SENNA - I was about... I think about 30 years old. But...

ANN MARIE LOPES - That was an excuse.

JOHN SENNA - Of course.

ANN MARIE LOPES - That was an excuse.

JOHN SENNA - I knew what it was. And so I was -- it was discrimination, you know.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yup.

JOHN SENNA - You know, and -- because you couldn't discriminate against age, so I knew right away I had them. So I told them about it, and I charged them -- I went to the NAACP, and I charged them with discrimination. So they wrote a letter -- so they called me in, said "Why do you want to do this to us?" I said, "I just want to work, that's all. I want to learn the trade." Hunh. So they argued all kind of ways, you know. They didn't want me in there at all. They didn't want no minorities in there at all. Because they'd never had minorities in there. And -- well, they had one minority. Two. Two... three. I met three or four there after awhile.

ANN MARIE LOPES - You could count.

JOHN SENNA - Huh?

ANN MARIE LOPES - You can count.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. And so they... and so I just continued pushing it. Finally they decided to give me a job as a union plumber. So they gave me a job at -- they were building Polaroid at the time. So that's why I went -- that's where I first started. So I went up there and I worked there for about, I think it was six months or more up there. Running pipes. I was doing the vacuum system there, you know, and did all that. And I stayed -- when I left there, I came home, they laid us off. And so I went to the union hall again. And they said, "OK, you got laid off, we're going to send you to another job." And so I went to work down on the Otis Air Force Base, me and this other guy. They were building a hangar there for the National Guards, so I went down there and I got the job putting in new pipes -- gas pipes, and gas heaters in the ceiling. And we did that -- I did that -- was there for about three months. Then we finished that job. When we left there, I came back home, and then they sent me to the power plant in Brayton Point, outside of Fall River. When you're going over the bridge, you see that power point there?

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yeah.

**JOHN SENNA** - That's where I went to work, there. And I was there for about a year. And that section's for jobs for the plumbers, and then -- so I came back, and that's when they were going to start United Front Homes. So I went -- they put me to work in the United Front. I was there for a little over a year. And I did all of the underground pipes -- that whole complex. And I did all of that, and I did all of the waste lines. I didn't do the copper lines. This other guy did the copper. I did all the PVC piping and cast-iron pipe underground. I did all that. And the plumber said, "Here, here's the blueprint. Do it."

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Oh, sheesh. (laughter) That would --

**JOHN SENNA** - I said, "Oh, OK. Yeah." I went ahead and did it. So I told him, I says, "You know, I don't have my license yet." He says, "Well, you're -- the other man there got the license." So I told him, "You do it, then." He says, "I don't know how to do it, John."

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Even with his license.

**JOHN SENNA** - I said, "OK." I says, "Give it to me; I'll do it." So I did it. Without my license. Without a license.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - That's the Cape Verdean ingenuity there.

**JOHN SENNA** - Yeah. Yeah. So I stayed there, United Front, until they were almost done. And then I left that job. I went down to Ben Rose Gardens. I worked there, putting pipes in there, for -- new pipes, building that place up. I did that for a year. Yeah, that one, and the one up the North End. So I was between both places, because a lot of them didn't know how to do it, so I had to go show them out to do that.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - That's -- well, self-taught, and you're teaching other people. That is great.

**JOHN SENNA** - Yeah. So I worked there for a long time. Then things got bad with the union. That's when they -- I got my license, and that's when all this part of the stuff coming out. And I knew, to go back with the union at the time, stay with them, I would be in trouble. I would be - about the union, it would be, or -- the men that were in the union were totally against me, because they listened to the Armand DeManche, you know, and all this and that. And to them, he was God. And, you know, I says, well, I can't go back to the union. So I went into my own business.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Yup. Probably the best thing.

**JOHN SENNA** - That's what I did. And I opened my own plumbing business. And I struggled -- we struggled for awhile. For a long time, you know? And I got jobs here and there, you know. And I tried to get into the construction trade, doing it as a plumber. But I couldn't do it. I couldn't -- I did some jobs, but what they did was, a lot of them outbid me. You know, I had a hard time figuring it out. I knew how to do the -- the reading the blueprints, and the takeoffs, what we call the takeoffs. But I had a hard time... it was the hourly wages, and figuring all that in, with the...

ANN MARIE LOPES - The business side.

JOHN SENNA - The business side.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yeah, the personnel side.

JOHN SENNA - And I had to add that on with the plumbing and all that, and submit that bid in. So I did one -- I came -- I did one for \$85,000. And this other guy, Neville Heating, they bid, it was, I think, \$82,000. No, \$81,000. And there was another contractor, Montel, he bid \$83,000. I was the highest bidder.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yup.

JOHN SENNA - But they gave it to Neville Heating. And... but I heard he was sorry after he got it, because he bid too low.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Yeah. It cost him, and he lost money.

JOHN SENNA - Yeah. And then the other... And I bid on another job. I bid -- (inaudible) of an Eagles home on Purchase Street. They made apartments. I bid that job. I came in -- that job was \$170,000. And so when I submitted the bid, the guy that owned it says, he looked at the bid, and he says, "John, too much money." I said, "What do you mean?" I said, "That's what I bid." I says, "I'm bidding -- that's the plumbing." And he says, "Well, that's also the heating?" I said, "No, that's just the plumbing. You've got a lot of apartments here." And he said, "No, that's too much. I'll give you the job if you can do the plumbing and the heating together for \$170,000." I told him no. No. No, I says, I can't do that. He says, "Well, you can't get the contract." Well, anyways, he gave it to this other guy. Well, you see, the contract reads, right, when you do that, that apartment, you've got to come up with cast iron from under the ground all the way up to the first story, up high, ten stories -- it had to be all cast-iron. From then on you could go to PVC. They came from PVC underground all the way up.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Oh, he messed up.

JOHN SENNA - So they messed up -- they had to take that all out. Cost them a fortune.

ANN MARIE LOPES - I have one last question. Sunshine Ramos used to raise the flag at the Allan Wood School.

JOHN SENNA - I raise the flag, yeah.

ANN MARIE LOPES - You -- now. You do it now. Why? Why did you take over?

JOHN SENNA - Well, see, Sunshine -- I don't know if you know who Sunshine was. Sunshine used to live over here. Sunshine --

ANN MARIE LOPES - Over here on 6<sup>th</sup> Street? No --

JOHN SENNA - Bedford Street.

ANN MARIE LOPES - Bedford Street, right.

JOHN SENNA - Sunshine used to raise the flag. When they tore the school down -- this is the story. When they tore the school down, they had to put a monument up there for the school, and a

flagpole. So they were there one day, raising the flag. So Sunshine was there, watching them. So one of them made a comment, "Well, we're raising the flag now. Who's around this neighborhood that's going to raise the flag every day around here?" -- sarcastic question. Sunshine says, "I'll do it every day until the day I die." So he did. Sunshine used to get up in the morning, go to church, walk the street before he'd go to church: he'd detour, put the flag up, back up, and go into church. Open the church up. That was the job. Set everything up in the church, stay there, and come home, have his lunch, go back to church in the evening and get ready to lock the church up after the Mass in the afternoon. He'd come back down, go down, take the flag down, and go home. He did that every day. And I watched this man: everybody watched him. Everybody knew Sunshine.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Right.

**JOHN SENNA** - And... so when he got sick, and he couldn't do it no more, his son Slappy did it.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Yeah.

**JOHN SENNA** - So Slappy was raising the flag for awhile. And then I think Slappy was bothering him: he got sick -- I don't know if he got sick or what happened. His brother Jackie started doing it, but he lived in Acushnet.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Oh. That was a lot for him.

**JOHN SENNA** - He came all the way down there. So one day the flag wasn't up. I said, "Jackie, what's the matter?" He said, "Gee," you know, "I can't --" I said, "Jackie, give me the flag, and I'll do it every day." So he said, "OK." And he gave it to me, and I've been raising it every day.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - So how long -- how long have...

**JOHN SENNA** - 22 -- right now it's about 22 years.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Wow.

**JOHN SENNA** - If not longer.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Wow.

**JOHN SENNA** - And when I raise it -- I raise it every day.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - And it's the same flag?

**JOHN SENNA** - Huh?

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - It's the same flag.

**JOHN SENNA** - Well, it's... no. I change the flags because --

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - It wears out.

**JOHN SENNA** - It wore out and everything like that. But I... the city never gives me a flag. Never gave me a flag. I used to get the flag from a friend of mine that worked for the Nantucket Steamship Authority. They had a lot of flags. He used to give me the flag all the time. He'd say, "Here, John, here's a new flag." That way I always put up the new flag. I used to put up the new flag all the time.



**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Huh. Wow. And you still do it.

**JOHN SENNA** - I haven't taken the flag down for about two or three weeks, because I says, "I'm not taking that flag down until all the boys come home from overseas." I said, "This war's got to stop. But the minute it stops, I'll bring the flag down. But as long as they're there, I'm going to leave the flag flying. I'll let it fly. Day and night. I won't take it down." I'm stubborn that way.

**ANN MARIE LOPES** - Well, I'd like to thank you for your time.

**JOHN SENNA** - You're welcome.

***End of File***