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Raymond, Jean, Oral history interview conducted by **Michelle Freitas, Spring, 2009**, 2009 East Cambridge Childhoods Oral History Project, Cambridge Historical Society



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Jean Raymond, Oral history interview conducted by **Michelle Freitas, Spring, 2009**, 2009 East Cambridge Childhoods Oral History Project; Cambridge Historical Society.

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Oral History Interview with **Jean Raymond**

2009 East Cambridge Childhoods Oral History Project

Interview conducted by Michelle Freitas in **Spring, 2009**

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MF: Where did your family come from?

JR: My mother came from Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. It was a little town called Abram's River. My dad came from Digby, Nova Scotia. My dad lived in Maine for a while before he met my mom. I had an aunt living on Otis St. She had a boarding house and my dad had a room there. As a result my mother met my father that way. It was my mom's sister. My mother's family grew up in Abram's River, Nova Scotia. Most of them came to this country as they got older. They came here to work. My mother did that too. She was a cook. She and my aunt used to cook in Boston in a little shop where they made donuts. It was called Mary's Tea Room. They didn't work there for very long. It used to be on Tremont St. It was of course long before I was born. When my parents married, they lived in East Cambridge. They got married in Boston at St. Cecilia Church. I believe they lived on Hurley Street before they bought the house on Thorndike St. I think they bought the house in 1923 the year my brother was born. I still live in the same house, all 75 years. When my mom and dad died, the house was deeded over to me. My sister was actually born in the house. I have two sisters and two brothers. All there is left is a brother and myself, the oldest and the youngest. We all went to school here at Sacred Heart. I did 12 years at Sacred Heart. My brothers and sister went to Cambridge High and Latin and Rindge.

My brothers both went into the service and my sister didn't get married until her thirties. We all went to Sacred Heart and were very active in the church. My brothers were altar boys. They were also in the Boy Scouts. One brother became a leader at some point. I joined the Girl Scouts. I did that for a few years until I was in my freshman year of high school. I joined the Girls Scout Glee Club. As a result, two friends and I were asked to be part of a show. I think it was called Teen Time. It was a weekly show. We had the opportunity to perform all summer on this show. We only did it for one year, one season. It was fun to do. We had to rehearse every Thursday and Saturday. I think we were in our first year of high school. Other than that, we always sang in the church choir. I play the piano and as I got older, I played at some of the services and to this day I still do.

Being part of Teen Time, did that make you a celebrity at school?

Yes I guess, in a way. The show was only on during the summer. Naturally family watched it. It had to go by word of mouth but I'm not even sure the kids knew it existed unless you told them. A couple of times people on the street recognized you from television. That was part of growing up here. The biggest thing I remember about growing up here is the community. It was the friendliest neighborhood

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you could want to be in. All our neighbors on the street were our friends. In the summer, we would always meet in the morning and play in the street. We would always play ball. Instead of a bat, we used our hand. We used a soft rubber ball. We didn't want to break any windows. We would make up our bases on the street. In those days there were hardly any cars around. You could do that easily. We all came from big families. I was the only one growing up in my family. My brothers and sister were 8-10 years older than me. I grew up more or less on my own. I had lots of friends and all our neighbors. We just chummed around together and had fun. We would play hide-and-seek and other games. I was more of a tomboy growing up. I remember climbing fences. Those were the days you could go into somebody's yard. We never got yelled at except for one person. I remember he had peach trees in his yard. We weren't after the peaches but maybe some other kids were. I remember my mother telling me not to go into other peoples' yards. I would always tell her they don't mind but she would just ask me how I would like it if they ran through our yard. We had a lot of laughs. It was a fun time growing up. Everyone knew each other in the neighborhood. Even if your friends went to public school, you still knew them. To me it was the best time to grow up. It was a fun time. I have no regrets. There were some gangs. There would be a gang from that street or this street and a gang from our area. There would be times you would attempt to meet. I don't know what you call them but whip trees. You would take the leaves off the branch and it would be like a whip. We would go around threatening the other gangs. Like I said, I was more of a tomboy when I was younger. The neighborhood was always very friendly. One woman I remember in particular. When she came home from work, we would meet her halfway and walk her the rest of the way home. She always gave us coins or candy. We didn't have the toys the kids have today and all those electronics. I don't think we even had a portable radio. We made our own fun. We did a lot with our church. I was a member of the East End Union. That's where we had our Girl Scout meetings. I went to cooking class there. When they had their board meetings, the girl scouts were asked to serve. We learned the proper way to serve food. It was a good education for all of us and we had fun.

Did you grow up during WW2?

Yes, I remember the air raid signals. My mother and I would be outside with our neighbors and we would hear the air raid siren. That meant we had to get inside the house quickly. It was a scary time. The air raid warden lived on our street. Every time we saw him, we knew something was going on. There were curfews by 10, children mostly. I mostly recall all this during the summer month than any other time. I remember putting the black paper across your windows especially in the cellars. When

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WW2 ended I was in Nova Scotia visiting my mom's family. I remember hearing it on the radio. Everyone was cheering and blowing horns and banging pans. My sister and I were sorry we weren't home at the time. My two brothers were in the service. They both served overseas. One was on the LST boats and the other was a pilot. They both didn't even know the other was in Hawaii. They passed each other on the street and were very surprised to see each other. I remember when the war was over one brother stayed in the service.

Going back a little, during the High School year, my one brother got scarlet fever and didn't finish high school. I was in grade school and had to be quarantined for that. So when he was old enough, he enlisted. My memory takes me to a place on Cambridge St where you could get food if you needed it. They gave you milk, butter, apricots, raisins, and things like that. My mom used to get a lot of that because our neighbors didn't like some of some of the items. I remember butter was scarce so you would get this white margarine and with it came this red pill that you would mix in the white that would color it to look like butter. It had a horrible taste. We had to do that for a while. My family was fortunate. We didn't have a lot of money but when she could, my mom would shop at Kennedy's. It was near the railroad tracks. She would buy coffee, butter, and peanut butter. We were lucky that we didn't always have to go down to get the rations. I remember my mom and dad worked at Squire's. It wasn't for very long and I think it was before they were married. I remember that burning down.

What do you remember of the fire?

I was not in Cambridge when it happened. When I came back, it was still raging. I remember hearing about it on the radio. I remember how devastated people were. It affected everybody. A lot of people were out of work. It made a big difference in Cambridge. We walked down to a restaurant (La Hacienda) where the firemen were going in there for breaks. I think that was the last of Squire's. It didn't open up after that.

Do you remember any other factories?

My sister worked at the candy factory for a short time. It was called something else before Necco. I remember now, Durands Candy Factory. She also worked somewhere else--where they made things for the war. Peter Graves and Badgers were the names. There was a bookbindery where my brother worked nights putting himself through school. There was a place we used to go to get rolls and cakes. It

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was down on Binney St or Bent St. For 12 cents you get a bag of butter finger rolls and for 15 cents a bag of the pecan rolls. My girlfriend's mom would send her down there and I went with her. When I brought a bag home for my mother, she gave me money so that when I knew I was going down there again I would bring some back. Once a week we used to make the trip. You had to take a left on Bent St from Third St. When I was in high school and later, they didn't exist anymore. You could go down there watch and see how they made frosted cakes. They had these big vats of frosting and they would lower the cake on a machine into the vat. It would come out dripping in frosting. The guys would ask us if we wanted to try some. We said no thank you unless you wanted to give us the cake. My sister worked for Carter Ink for many years. There was a diner down there that everyone went to. I think it was across from Carter Ink. I do remember going there after work and after bowling. Great Diner!

Where did you go bowling?

We used to go to Bowl Haven in Central Sq. It had a big fire and we went to another one bowling alley in Central Sq. That one wasn't as good as Bowl Haven. We did bowl there for a while but I had to stop because my folks were older. They needed someone to be home with them. I used to bowl with a group from work; not mine but my girlfriend's work. Bowling was one of my favorite things to do besides the piano and singing. In the early years, my two girlfriends and I used to sit on the steps and learn all the new songs. A lot of people would walk by and clap for us. My girlfriend's father was a pianist and he used to play in a club in Somerville. We would go visit and sing songs. He thought it was great. In those days kids sat on their steps and nobody bothered us. We didn't cause trouble; we just liked music. It was a fun thing to do. Who really does anything like that today? It's a complete change of a neighborhood. I don't even know my neighbors anymore. I'm retired so even though I'm around, I see that they are all working. They're busy and they got things to do. I have a car so I drive everywhere so I don't get to walk around and meet people. I was told to get a dog so I can take walks with it and then maybe meet other people. I'm not going to do that though.

Did you have any pets growing up?

Yes always cats. It was always an in and out cat. I used to pretend the cat was a baby. I would put him in the carriage and wrap him up in blankets. My father used to say I was going to drive that cat crazy

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and the cat doesn't belong in the carriage. Today I have four cats. My neighbor and I feed the outdoor cats. That's what I love about my neighborhood. We are all animal lovers. My other new neighbor has a dog and the neighbor on the left has a dog but they have a cat too. It's nice that we all like animals. My dad was a hunter; he loved hunting. He always had beagles. He started going hunting when he couldn't go to work anymore. The first dog we had was a great dog. The second dog we had just didn't like people. He could be vicious. My girlfriend in grammar school used to pick me up (not literally) to go to school. That's what we used to do. We would pick each other up and walk to school. My girlfriend was so used to the old beagle and she didn't know we got a new one. She's thinking about poor Rover and as she came to get me one morning, sure enough the dog went after her. She's yelling to me about Rover and I tell her it isn't Rover. The dog either had to be tied up or you had to go through the front. It would have been detrimental if the dog actually attacked her. We used to have the garbage men come in our driveway in the back My Aunt was staying with my mom because she was sick. There was a knock on the door and it was the rubbish man. The dog was in his pen but my aunt didn't know that. The man came to get the garbage and thinks what a nice dog and puts his hand in and loses his glove. My aunt knew the garbage man and the way he had his hand, she thought the dog bite his hand. She panicked and called to me about the dog. I told her the dog was locked up and I had to get the glove for the man.

You said that your mother had her sister. Did your parents have any other siblings in the area?

We don't know much about my father's family. His siblings died very young. My father was married twice which we didn't find out until later. My dad's first wife died in childbirth. His children were put into foster homes. When my mother was going to marry my dad, she was willing to find his five children but he thought it was too big an undertaking for a new bride. The children lived in Maine and they ended up finding my father. One of the brothers, however, lived in Malden and they contacted us when I was in my senior year. We found all this out on the day of my brother's wedding as a matter of fact. It was a shock to find this out.

My mother's brothers and sisters lived around Cambridge and Somerville and one lived in Wellesley. We pretty much grew up with our aunts and uncles. I have many recollections of walking to their houses. One lived up on Highland Avenue. We were very close with them.

Were there a lot of people from Nova Scotia in the area?

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No, not really. There was another family I knew of towards Windsor St. I don't think there were as many coming over to this area. There were a lot in Back Bay and many in Somerville. Others branched out to other areas but not many relatives that I knew of. Cambridge and Somerville was the easiest place for a family to settle from Nova Scotia. They would get off the boat in Boston and would be met by someone they knew. My aunt was older than my mother and their siblings would come here to work. My grandmother lived until she was almost 102. They had to leave the house to support their mother. One of my uncles lived with my grandmother. Then he died of cancer and that left her alone. She insisted on staying in the homestead. They had to hire someone to take care of her. She came to Boston a few times. She had cancer on her face. I think she went to Brigham and Women's to have the cancer removed and she was written up in a medical journal. She was about 92 when that happened. She liked it around here. She told her children that she could see why they settled here.

You said you went up to Nova Scotia.

I went many times. From the age of ten, I started to go visit with my mother. We would take the bus up and change in Augusta. Then take another bus or train to Yarmouth and then someone would pick us up. We used to go there regularly in the summer. Perhaps one or two weeks sometimes I got to stay longer. There was an aunt there that could look after me. Sometimes they would ship me home on a boat from Yarmouth to Boston. I never liked the boat. I'm not a good sailor. I spent a lot of my summers there. After I started working, I didn't go as much.

What stores do you remember in the neighborhood?

I remember First National on the corner of Cambridge and Fifth. There was a shoe place on Fifth St as well as the tailor's. Patsy the Shoemaker was his name. I think Patsy was a nickname and that's the only name I know. He was a great guy. He liked to give you a hard time but he always had your shoes ready. There were these taps you could put on the bottom of your shoes. We liked the sound when we were walking plus they kept our heels from wearing down too quick. He would ask Patsy to put the taps on our shoes and he never understood why we wanted them. There was a home bakery across from First National. Egan's Drugstore was where Champa's Apothecary is right now. Twin Brothers was on Fourth St. There was a market across from that. Joe Olivio's was a coffee place. There was a poolroom. There was Al's shoe store close to Egan's. There was Corenthal's a clothing place. Those

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stores were all on Cambridge St. There was Lynch's. It was a hole in the wall and you could get penny candy. There was Glyner's, (spelling???) which was a drugstore near Fulkerson St. There was always a cleaners and tailor at the corner of Sixth St and Cambridge. There was Dine's store. It was like a five and ten cent store. My sister worked in that store for a while. I remember ice cream parlors and we were always told to stay away from the poolroom. There was the Hippodrome. I think Sacred Heart owned that building. We used to go there and see shows. Before my time there was St. John's Church which is now a park and I guess that was Sacred Heart initially. When the church was taken down, we used to go up there for it was our playground. It wasn't really a playground; it was just filled with rocks. The nuns would take us up there and half the time we were falling and getting cut. That didn't last too long. They would block off Sixth and Seventh St and that would be our playground. We used to go home for lunch and if you came back early enough, you could play there until the school bell rang. Mable's used to sell pickles on Sixth St. There was another store selling pickles past Seventh St. We would go down there and get pickles and popcorn. You weren't allowed to bring food into school but of course we did. We loved pickles and we would buy these big sour pickles. It was put in a paper bag. We would hide them in our desk. When the nun wasn't looking, we would take a bite. The nun would eventually say she smells pickles. My girlfriend and I were the ones who usually the guilty ones. The nun would say she knows who had them and she'll catch them. There was a cleaners (called Russo's) near St. Francis Church. They also sold tuxedos. The family lived there for years. The old man was very pleasant. They had a daughter and the rest were boys. Of course there is Percoco's on the corner of Fifth & Thorndike St. Dan says he remembers me coming in with my uniform on.

Did you ever go to Harvard Sq?

Not much. We would walk up there once in a while. We went to the movie theater there. We went to the Inman Theater quite often. I had an aunt who lived near there. I remember visiting a my cousins on Cambridge St. When I was old enough to stay overnight there, I remember hearing the trolley buses. I told my mother I couldn't sleep there because all you heard were the buses going by. I remember the days of the milk wagon with the horse. The milkman would drop off the bottles of milk. I remember Dick the ice cream man. There was also a man going around selling crabs. My girlfriend loved them -- I didn't. Aunt Jemima was a man who sold snowballs, the shaved ice. I remember the ice man, selling the large ice cubes back when people had the ice boxes. He would cut up the ice to the right size and we would ask him for the ice chips.

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Do you remember the neighborhood being mostly Italian or Irish?

It was mostly Italian and Irish. Those were the two predominate nationalities. A few like myself were French Canadian. We had a few Polish people and Portugese people . It was definitely mostly Italian and Irish. My mother never cooked spaghetti like my girlfriend's mother so she'd been told. My mother had good friends and she would always ask them how they made their spaghetti sauce. One time my girlfriend came over for dinner and we asked how it was. She said it wasn't bad but not like her mom's. I don't know what the difference was. I think it was olive oil or garlic. My mother didn't use those items. I never felt out of place. Everybody thought I looked Italian. It was a fun neighborhood, a good neighborhood. There was the Italian church St. Francis. There was a Polish church on Otis St called St. Hedwig. There is Sacred Heart and at that time I think it was mostly Irish. Today Sacred Heart has all different kinds of ethnicities. It's a good community church.

You talked about going bowling and playing in the streets. Do you have any other favorite places you liked to visit? I know you mentioned a lot but there was bowling and the movies.

There used to be the Lechmere Theater on Cambridge St. We were allowed to go to the movies there. We would frequent them every week. My family was in the habit of eating dinner earlier than my friends' families. I always had to ask my mother if I could eat something quick before I would go. Sometimes I wasn't allowed to go unless I returned the bottles. You would get 5 cents for the big bottles and 2 cents for the little ones. My siblings had to do that before me but my mother always told me how I hated to do that. Sometimes you had to go to more than one store. Not all stores took the same bottles. I would always ask my mother for money now to go to the movies and say I would do the bottles during the week. I was the youngest and my sister would say I would get away with a lot. In those days you had to bring the bottles back to the store to get your money. I mean I guess you do that today but you didn't have people coming by to pick them up. Anyway, we went to the theater weekly. We would go Friday and Saturday night or if not Saturday, then Sunday. If we could get away with going all three days, we'd go.

Were you part of any activities with school or your church?

The Glee Club and Girl Scouts activities took place during the day when I was younger. I became more active in things as I got older. St. Francis had a community theater group, which I was a part of. That

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involved singing, dancing, and acting. There really weren't any clubs other than the East End Union. I don't recall too many places we could go to have fun. We were in a few minstrel shows that the church had. In high school, I worked the bazaars for the parishes and still do to date. For instance, I taught Sunday School for 29 years and currently play the piano and direct a children's choir at the 9:00 a.m. Mass at Sacred Heart Parish.

Do you remember the jail at the courthouse?

Yes I do remember that. We were never afraid much. If there was a jailbreak, you would hear the horns and see all the lights. I remember once when I was working and walking home I went by the jail. When I got home, my mother was so relieved because there was a jailbreak. She said I missed the horns but they didn't catch the guy yet. We were never really afraid. Maybe it was because we grew up with it. There was never much trouble. Then they remodeled the building making it a Court House with a few floors serving as a jail. It was a broken-down building for the longest while. It wasn't that you didn't think about; it's just you didn't live in fear of it.

You said your parents worked at Squire's. Do you remember any other jobs they had?

No, not around here. My mother worked as a cook and a house in Geneva, New York. I think the people she worked for had property in Back Bay and then in the summer months, they had a place in New York. I think that's how she got to work out there. Once she married my father, she was a housewife. She never worked when we were kids. She was a stay-at-home-mom. My father was a carpenter. He would work from April to November and then be laid-off during that time. My mother was a very good manager. My dad was a saver. Knowing how his work would go, he always managed to have enough to put food on the table. My mother knew how to handle her money. We always had clothes and new shoes. I remember at Christmas we always got new shoes. Being a carpenter, your house is always the last house to be fixed. My mother used to do all the painting. My mother was very handy. When my dad had to fix something, he would get around to it, but we were always the last ones to get anything fixed. My dad had odd jobs being a carpenter. He would go where the work would take him. When he retired he took over my mom's job. He did the washing, shopping, wanting to cook. My mother would say that he was driving her crazy. My father died at 88 and my mother at 82. They got to see a lot of changes. All the way down from Third St has completely changed. My brother came up to

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visit from Texas. He likes to walk and he said he almost got lost because he didn't even recognize anything.

Do you think the level of crime has changed in the area?

I think since they put in the Galleria Mall, there has been more crime. It's not so much that your directly involved and you don't always hear about it. A lot of people come into this area. the neighborhood itself is not bad. Occasionally you might hear something that happened. I am a cautious person and I am alert. I know to be careful but I'm not afraid. I think it's a relatively safe place.

Do you think East Cambridge is different from the rest of Cambridge? Do you think East Cambridge is unique?

We always heard it said that the other side of the tracks is Cambridge and this side of the tracks is East Cambridge. We used to say that we are better than they are. That goes way back to when we were kids. We would say that we're better because we're from East Cambridge until someone put you in your place. I don't think now we are aware of any distinction. As a kid growing up, there was a difference.

It was mentioned before, but is there less of a community now?

Yes definitely I think that's the biggest thing I notice. A lot of people have scattered, a lot have moved out. I know people from church but I know less now and I have been here 75 years. I only know a few of my neighbors; we made it a point to know each other. It's a bit sad when you're just two doors away and you don't really know who our neighbors are. The neighborhood has definitely changed. I do get the feeling that people are trying to become a closer knit community. There are more children on my street than there has been for many years. I feel like more families are settling in. It's a very expensive area though. You have to buy. There isn't much renting and buying is probably the only way one could come back to Cambridge.

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