

Rita Lopes (Nate Smith House)

Interviewed by Jean Cadet & Vivian Jackson (2005)

My name is Rita Verna Lopes. I have no nickname, and I don't want one! I was born in Boston, MA on May 22, 1931. I lived in the South End —where Chinatown is now— and in Roxbury. It wasn't rural, it was city! Actually, I grew up on Harrison Ave. where the Teradyne Building and the Boston Herald are now. Back then, the neighborhood was diversified, there were Italians, Chinese, all different kinds of people in the South End. People got along with each other better than now. Everyone looked out for each other. Of course, sometimes you didn't want them to, because if you did something wrong they'd be the first ones to tell your parents.

My mother's name was Grace. My father's name was Thomas. They're both passed away now. I lived with my Mother and Dad, and I had seven siblings, five brothers and two sisters. We had a large family. My brothers and sisters were Vernon, Jacqui, John, Raymond, Lawrence, Joan and Ralph. I was the oldest of my siblings. There were eight of us and we were always into mischief. We'd argue, hit, fight ... all of that. I never ran away because I was too scared. I had a sister who ran away ... but not me. We did have pets, both cats and dogs, but, oh golly, I don't remember the dog. Minnie was our cat.

We had to be home by six o'clock, and my father would come out and get us if we weren't. Sure, I got in trouble with my parents. Our punishment was that we'd have to stay in for a week! Then, when we went back out we'd do something else and we'd have to stay out for another week! Yes, we had to do chores. If we didn't, my Dad would snap off his belt if we didn't do it. Now you can't hit your kids, but in those days they use to beat us. If we said anything we weren't suppose to say, we'd get slapped.

I went to the public schools through 12th grade. I didn't want to do that, but I did. All my "trades" came after I got out of school. That includes cake-decorating, arts and crafts of all types, and knitting and crocheting. I love anything to do with my hands, and I like to teach crafts, too. That's the reason that I'm here. I want to make a drum for myself!

No I hated school, but I had Dress-making and Home-making, and I loved those. When it came to History and Science, I didn't like it. I wasn't one to do homework. But right now I'm taking Spanish. It's hard, but I know better now, so I'm sticking to it. When I was young, when I didn't get it right away, I figured I was stupid and I gave up too soon. My school was all girls. It was practical arts, so we use to make hats and clothes ... I liked that.

When I was in high school I was kind of an introvert. I'd go up in my room and read books. I went to the High School of Practical Arts. It doesn't exist any more, I guess they made it into something else. My entertainment was reading books. When I went to a dance I was a wallflower! There use to be dances at Revere Beach, but I didn't like to

dance, and I was afraid of guys. I didn't want them near me! I use to roller skate, too.

When I was a child we use to love to go camping in Montreal. The whole family would jump into the car—We'd take a tent and camp out together. With our friends from high school we'd go Hosteling. Our teacher who took us made reservations down the Cape, so we'd go down to South Station with our bikes, and they let us get on the back of the train. We didn't have to pay. When we got off, there was a youth hostel where we stayed. We rode our bikes all over.

If fact, one time I rode a bike from the South End to Providence, Rhode Island and back with my Dad! They had a special celebration down there called Emancipation Day, so we decided to go visit a friend of mine (I later married him!) in Providence. We left Boston about 7 o'clock in the morning and got to Rhode Island about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. This was before there was Rte. 95, so we went down Rte. 1 all the way through Dedham and Walpole all the way to Providence.

When we were young we played Hopscotch, Kick the Can, things like that. I was always in a recreational program when I was a child, so I did arts and crafts. I did a lot of sewing, read a lot. In our day, parents never talked to you about personal things, so I would send away for the books and read. American Girl magazine ... no, it was Miss America, so I use to read things like that. Everything that I ever learned, I figured that anybody can do that! So now I teach other people.

I don't care where I am, people are the same everywhere. I've been to Korea, I've been to Germany, I've been to Hawaii, and when I came home people asked me "how were the people?" People are all human everywhere. I would say they were the same as here, some people are nice, some people aren't. I went over there because my daughter is in the military, and I went over to baby-sit. It was in the city, or it would be like the suburbs here.

When I was growing up, we had hard times. My Mom was always pregnant, but she worked through all her pregnancies. And when the baby came, she usually be working! She was a very fast typist ... one of the fastest in Boston. We didn't have much money. My Mother never went to college, my Dad never went to college. He worked three jobs because he had eight kids. I never went to college, but some of my brothers and sisters did, and they're no better off than I am. Maybe, worse.

During the Depression we use to have to stand in line for our food, and we had to go to church for our shoes because we didn't have any money. When Christmas and Easter came along, my Dad did service work, sometimes the people might give him some extra money, so he'd bring it home and that's how we got whatever. But I was never homeless, and I never had to worry about being out in the street, so I've had a good life.

When I got out of high school, I worked. I had to work to contribute to the family.

I was a Clerk, and I worked the Multigraph machine. You'd stand there and feed paper into the machine. We did mailings, insert mail into envelopes. Now they have computers to do everything like that. It was nothing brainy, just a job ... but life was good. If you have a roof over your head, and you're able to eat— and a lot of people aren't — then your life is good.

When we were young everyone got sick once in a while. I had a brother who use to have convulsions. One of my other brothers got Impetigo ... it was like a rash that was very contagious. But we use to have good food, we drank plenty of milk, ate plenty of meat. We always had food in the house. We weren't afraid of getting sick because we didn't know about a lot of illnesses. Nowadays, everybody knows about everything because you hear it on TV, in the papers, and everywhere you look. So people are more educated. Back then, the doctor use to come to the house. If someone was sick, all you had to do was pick up the phone and call your doctor, and they would come to see you. We only went to the hospital if we had to. Like I broke my arm once when I was riding my bicycle.

I had a husband, but another woman got him after 35 years of marriage. His name was Kenneth. But that's all right now. It wasn't at first , but you have to get over it. There's always two sides to the story, so you move on. I have five great children: Stephen, Robert, Virginia, Yvonne, and Donna.

Yes, I drive. I think I learned when I was about 18. I don't remember who taught me, but I love driving. I drive from here to Virginia by myself all the time. I like to drive straight through. I don't like to stop and stay in a motel, so I just drive without stopping. I have two daughters in Newport News, VA. I just went there two weeks ago to a quilt show! I have a new Camry, and it's so comfortable. I love to drive.

I like all the seasons because I like variety. I like whatever comes. My favorite kind of music is Jazz. I like Sadé, Celine Dionne, Kenny G and Yanni. No, I don't play any instruments. I like sports: football, basketball, baseball. I like all colors, but especially the colors of nature.

I have a son who's fifty now. He was born with a heart defect, and he had to be operated on when he was 7 years old. It was 80% that we wasn't going to live after the operation because it was open heart surgery. That was my biggest time of fear in my life. But he's had four pacemakers put in, but you take one day at a time, and he's lived to be fifty years old.

Life is beautiful. I have wonderful times. Everyone has tough times, but you just pray, and the spirit will help you. The way I grew up, it was a learning experience for now. No matter which way my life was. You make life the best that you can. I always had food, I had a home, I went to school, so what more can you ask for in life. The rest is up to you.

When I wake up in the morning, I'm thankful for waking up! And when I go to bed at night, I thank God for giving me a good day. That's what's happening in my life. Thank you for whatever happens, because the bad experiences you learn from, and the good experiences you're grateful for and you share with someone else.

My advice to you? Well, from talking to you, you're doing all right. What do you want to be when you get through with school. An accountant? Listen, and learn how to invest your money. We didn't know about investing, but I know how to make a buck. I sold Avon products, and I can make things to sell. But while your young, learn everything you can about investing for your future.

Ana Rosa Lozano (Nate Smith House)

Interviewed by Yanitza Medina & Nidia Flores (2006)

"I was born June 12th 1926 on a farm in Columbia. I lived with my parents, brothers and sisters and our dogs until I grew up. The climate of my country is moderate, it never really changes. There were not many people where I grew up, but everyone got along well. At home, we wanted for nothing. We did not have money but there was always an abundance of food. There were milk cows, chickens, there was food of every kind, and we ate everything imaginable. The house was tiny, with two bedrooms, a kitchen area, and a small living room. All around us there were fruit trees such as orange and apple trees. My parents had many responsibilities on the farm.

I went to school only for a year. There I learned very little. Unfortunately, I only stayed in school until I was about ten years old. When I arrived home from school, I had to feed my brothers and sisters, clean the house and work for the family. I almost never left the house. I also didn't finish school because, since I was the oldest, I had to take care of everyone else. Many times I could not make it to school or I had to leave early to receive and take care of my siblings. I had many responsibilities. Later, the school would punish me and they hit me with wooden sticks. I did not like that they hit us like that! I decided to leave and I told them: ðlf I go to school I will not be hit in school, and if I stay home, at home I will not be hit!í

I liked school but my parents did not force me to go because I had to take care of the kids. One of them I had to watch as they slept, others I had to feed, so my life was dedicated to them. I worked in the house, fetching water, and doing all of the daily chores. I resigned myself to the maintenance of the home. My youth was not pleasant or care-free. Because of my age, it was my responsibility to take care of all of my brothers and sisters. What could I do? Some of my brothers and sisters went to school and the younger ones stayed at home, and I maintained the house and my siblings.

I had many friends, and my only diversion was to escape from the chores of the household for a while to play with them. I have some lovely memories. One time I climbed on a bicycle and lost my balance. I remember how I played istore.î Sometimes I would meet up with my cousins. I would escape from the house, and look for them at

their house, and from there we would escape to a hidden place surrounded by trees, there our parents could not see us from their houses. We constructed a store made out of garbage there, but we sold every little thing! In my youth I loved to make things with my hands.

When my brothers and I became older, we had more opportunities to go out. There were parties for young people and social events at church. The parties were wonderful and happy times. My parents would let me go out, but there was always a fixed time to leave the house and return home. My parents were very strict. Sometimes I would go out in secret because I had my own entrance into my room. We would go to parties and there were many boys who chased me. But one time I was very scared because a group of boys followed us in the streets and we did not know what their intentions were but we escaped.

My life has been very simple. We did not have luxuries, but we survived. Although my childhood was filled with work, I also had my diversions and distractions. I don't know anything about wars, there was fighting and revolutions close to Bogot, and people were killed, but that was all very far away for me.

In time I met a man, I fell in love, was married and we had children together. He was about ten years older than I was, but I loved him. He did many things for me; he gave me gifts and beautiful declarations of love. The guy was a good person and a very hard worker, but it was not like I was too lazy to work, I would have worked at anything. But, we were separated, and the separation was very hard on my children. My youngest daughter was seven and the oldest fourteen years old when we separated. But despite the separation, my children turned out well and found their way in life. Today one of my daughters is a secretary and the others are all educated and working.

I have been in the United States for fifteen years. The most difficult thing I have ever done was come to America. There are many differences between Columbia and the U.S. I like sports and in my time I used to like to play music, but now I can't. I love all four seasons. Nothing ever bothers me! There are many things that I would have liked to do, but I am also thankful that I have had the opportunities to do many different things.

It has been many years since my parents died. My father died at sixty and my mother died at sixty-eight years old. Now, I like to get up in the morning, say my prayers, then I go to the kitchen, and sit down to knit. I have always liked to knit. I find happiness in that I can still do all the things I like to do and take care of myself. I am content because I am still capable of doing my things like knit, sew and sweep. At least I just don't sit in front of the television. I know how to do many things, especially in the kitchen and with my hands. God has given me the strength to continue, step by step and I am very grateful.

I advise young people to do everything that is possible. Do everything that is good for

you, and choose a career that will serve you well and make you happy. To obtain success you have to fight and work very hard. Be ready to fight! There are many things to do in life, and one must take advantage of everything."