

Interview Laurie and Dennis Carrier

At The Roy's Home, Berlin, New Hampshire

Tuesday, July 21, 2009

Interviewer – Ken Turino

Crew – Joshua Silveira

Q: Well, thanks again for coming here tonight and giving up your time we really do appreciate it. We are really excited about this project. What I will ask is your name and if you could spell it.

DC: Okay. My name is Dennis Carrier. And last name spelled C A R R I E R.

LC: And I'm Laurie Carrier. Last name C A R R I E R.

Q: And, Laurie, were you born and raised in Berlin?

LC: Yes, I am a native of Berlin.

Q: if you don't mind I'm going to have you admit when you were born.

LC: I was born in 1959.

Q: And, Dennis, how about you?

DC: Yes. Born native here in Berlin and I was born in 1955.

Q: I see. And what neighborhood were you from, Dennis?

1:04 – DC: I born and raised on the East Side of Berlin close to the pulp mill here in Berlin.

Q: And was your family involved in the mills?

DC: Yes. My grandfather Carrier, my dad, and my brother, my oldest brother. We all worked in the mill and we are NOT working there any longer.

Q: Ah, I'll come back to that. Laurie, what about your family where did you grow up?

LC: I grew up on the West Side of town up on the Avenues and my dad worked in the mill as a chemist and retired from the mill.

Q: And if you were from the Avenues and you were from the East Side how did you two meet?

2:03 – LC: I believe it was through parties, graduation parties. Get together.

Q: We heard there are lot of good ones in Berlin.

LC: That there is (laughing).

Q: So did you go through the school system, Dennis?

DC: Yes. I did.

Q: And which school did you go through?

(Technical Adjustments)

Q: So, Dennis, you were telling us a little bit about, what?

DC: The schools.

Q: The schools!

2:53 – DC: Okay, I started on eat side Guardian Angel school went to eight grade. And then went to Berlin High School, 9th through 12th grade. And graduated high school with a diploma.

Q: And did you go right into the mills right after high school?

DC: Exactly. I graduated in 1973 and in 1974 started working in the mill.

Q: And what were you doing in the mills when you first started?

3:24 – DC: When I first started in, well, I had taken a two year welding class at the high school, so I fresh out of that program so when I entered the mill they had a notice on the bulletin board saying they needed welders. So, I applied, took a welding test from the mill, passed it, and became a welder in the mill. And that's how I started my career and have been doing it ever since.

Q: So you stayed in doing that kind of position?

DC: Right. Buy slow times, I curtailed a few times. Get back to the pool department they called it. But for the most part a steady welder for twenty six years.

Q: So you have lived through the progression of mills and owners?

DC: Right. Exactly.

Q: Was there a lot of uncertainty?

4:18 – DC: Yes. It had its slow periods, up and down swings, the market, paper and pulp markets. Lots of up and downs. But we dealt with it. We lasted twenty six years.

Q: And now you're not working with them.

DC: No. After they went bankrupt in 2001 with Pulp and Paper of America, I started working for a local machine shop, a fabrication shop Cross Machine. And I worked there for three years when the new owners, Frasier Paper, today, bought, had a chance to go back to the mill but I asked industrial relations what my position would be and I would be out of maintenance. I would no longer be a welder, I would have to go back to the pool. So I decided to stay with Cross Machine. And I stayed with them for five years. And now I am currently a welding instructor at the Berlin High School the local high school in Berlin. And I also am a welding instructor at the community college White Mountains Community College here in Berlin also.

Q: I would like to hear from Laurie a little bit about the role of the college. You said have been with for

5:52 – LC: I've been at the college for twenty six years. We've gone through a lot of name changes and a lot of changes within the college. When the mill closed down the college along with outside agencies partnered and developed training programs for individuals who wanted to retrain and find new careers. We have helped a number of people from the mill and they have gone on to other careers and are very happy. There were others who took the training programs simply to get their benefits through unemployment just looking for the opportunity to get back into the mill which some did. There were some that just had to retire because they didn't have any options.

Q: And how many students are usually in the school?

6:50 – LC: Currently we've got over a thousand students. So enrollment has increased and we are looking for future additions to the college. We just had a brand new addition put on. So we are looking to actually increase our curriculums, programs, as well as the physical building.

Q: And could you tell me just a little bit about specifically what you do there and a little bit, what the specific programs are there?

7:33 - LC: I began as a receptionist in the main office and I have worked my way up to program assistant for a division of community education. And what I primarily do is take care of the evening programs and training programs both credit and noncredit. So I have worked a lot with these outside agencies in

developing programs that will help individuals get into new careers or even find out what field they want to go in. Some of them have a hard time making up their minds in what they want to do. We do have mentor programs. We have the learning center to help them in both learning and studying. And the type of programs that these individuals would go into are mechanical trades; automotive, nursing, the welding program we have established. So a lot of them went into training programs like that. Today we have added new programs. We have a medical assisting program and a phlebotomy. So we keep updating our programs and adding new ones.

Q: That's great. It sounds like they play a very active role and important role in this community.

9:10 – LC: We do and working with the outside agencies helps us a great deal to so we can be connected to the individuals that are really in need of assistance in finding their way.

Q: What are some of these outside agencies you mention?

9:24 – LC: Health and Human Resources, we have Employment Security and they've got field offices in Groffton, was the most recent one to help steer these individuals and help them with their paper work so we have worked closely with.

Q: that sounds like a very satisfying position for you.

9:48 – LC: It is and it's so rewarding to see them at graduation. Change is not easy and they have faced money challenges both financially, personally, and academically so we have helped guide them through those challenges and to see them graduate is quite a reward.

Q: I bet, I bet that is. One of the questions we have been asking people is what in your lifetime because there seems to have been a lot of changes, you mentioned the college and what you have been able to do. What are some of the other things you have seen with the mills in the city. What has changed in the city and what are things that have remained the same?

10:40 – LC: Things that have remained the same that's a tough one. I don't think much has stayed the same except for some of the relationships we have. It is a close knit city. And everyone that grew up together are still together. Our children grew up together, played sports together and we still meet often. What has changed is I think is the mindset of everyone it was always like "Oh, the mill is never going to close" and when it did happen it was overwhelming for everyone, it was unbelievable. And then to realize that you have to find a new career at forty, fifty, sixty is just devastating.

Q: (Directed towards Dennis) How would you answer that question?

11:44 – DC: Very well explained, my dear. I've seen guys really get depressed when the mills shut down. Especially the unskillful ones. I was one of the lucky ones. I had a skill. I was able to get out into the industry and get a job right off. Some of the paper makers and laborers didn't and it was tough on them. Thank God the state got involved helped with the grant money for training. That's where I started my teaching career. With the mill shut down. So a lot of the guys took the program to learn a skill. Some of them pursued careers some of them didn't it wasn't for everyone. Devastating. The most devastating part for me was when the pulp mill was demolished. When you see the buildings you worked in for twenty six years. My main job was here in the pulp mill, some in the Cascade plant, but not as much in the pulp mill. So when the buildings started coming down, it broke my heart. No worse than my dad. My dad's front porch can hear the mill perfectly he lived up on the hill. Because I remember my dad telling me "Son," when I got my job the year after I graduated. "You are set for life, they will never shut this mill down, you're in, start a family, buy a house, you can live here the rest of your life. A secure job." But it didn't happen that way. Change is, is scary when you think of it when you have a family support. A lot of these people went through a lot of hard times with the change. And I tell my students that. You may have a secure job now but be ready for change in your life because I did. I use my life stories to let the kids know they need to be ready for change.

14:22 – LC: And it was sad to see some of the individuals who didn't have a skill or pursue a career eventually lost their home and had to move out of town and look for jobs elsewhere and that was sad to see. In fact my brother-in-law Dennis' brother is one of them. He lost his house and had to move out of town. Very happy I have to say but at the same time everything you have worked for years and years is suddenly gone.

15:01 – DC: Yup. Owned a beautiful home, had to let it go, he was out of work. Finally got a job in Concord and had to relocate which is a good thing. There are happy, they got things got back on track. A lot of families get hurt that way.

Q: One thing that I have learned from talking with people, including you, Dennis, is the loyalty people have towards the mills. And I have heard, especially with Browns, they were good to their workers. Even you considered going back and realized it wasn't the best for you and probably a good thing. You father, you were telling me about him, it seemed such a part of his life. Can you comment on that?

16:10 – DC: My dad, worked here as a young, right out of college, he was an accountant in the main office, head accountant, dedicated to the mill. He would

come home and say there was a lot of stealing, ya know, big mill. He had to check on equipment and stuff was missing and he would say "Man, I can't believe how people can do this." But he was dedicated to his job loved his job. Loved us, my brother. I can say he was shocked today. Even today when he stands on his front porch seeing that empty lot, that huge piece of land. The only thing left is the stack and boiler.

17:17 - LC: It was the bread and butter for most families in Berlin. It was the wives and the children that worked in the restaurants and grocery stores but the men, it was their bread and butter, it was their life, and very dependant on the mill

Q: Well, let me ask you this, moving away from the mills but everything is related in Berlin I've learned. What was the downtown like for you growing up and how did that change over time? How has it changed from when you were growing up in the 60s and 70s was that a vibrant community meeting place?

18:10 – LC: There were a lot of department stores. I remember going shopping for school clothes. It was very exciting. The main street had lots to offer and today we have very little to offer. But we are hoping. With change comes hope.

18:40 – DC: I remember as a kid growing up. Big treat. We were a big family, six kids, 3 boys 3 girls. Saturdays were a big treat. Saturday matinee. We would get money to go to the Princess Theater we were there every Saturday. We were there every Saturday didn't matter what was playing, Godzilla vs. King Kong or whatever was playing all those great creature feature movies, Elvis Presley movies. Big treat. And money for popcorn. My parents weren't rich, six kids. Gave us enough money for a popcorn, soda, and the movie. We would walk down and afterwards we walked up Main Street hit the shops. Woolworths. Woolworths had the nice diner. They had my favorite soda there the orange fountain soda, oh! Great! I remember that as a kid. George's Candy shop up further. The old bowling alley, we would go there once a month. That was once a month. Great years. We would be on foot or on bikes. Not like today, teenagers need a car, you don't see many kids on bikes like back in my days. It was a great time to grow up. During the summer months, away from school, the baseball field. Right down here by the mill. Everyday, every morning a bunch of my friends would meet and play until noontime.

20:36 – LC: And then there was the Community Center. They had the pool they had basketball. They had a bunch of activities down there. A bunch of us would hang out over there.

DC: Or the Community Club. That's where I learned to swim. They used to have swimming lessons they had pin pong machines.

Q: A lot of people have talked about the Community Center.

DC: Oh yeah, big hang out.

Q: I've never asked anyone else did the mills have any sports team themselves?

21:17 – DC: In my father's days not when I was working in the mills. But I've seen pictures of my dad, Brown Co., the bowling team the softball team but not in my day they seemed to get away from that, I don't know why.

Q: No one else mentioned it. It just popped into my mind.

LC: I think after Brown Co. sold it, the Browns sold it, it started to change.

Q: Well, are there any particular stories that you would like to tell us about growing up in Berlin that we should know that we should get on camera.

22:10 – DC: I've got a real good one. In fact the guys you just interviewed reminded me about this one. About my father, Oscar Carrier. He was a big hockey fan his whole life and he wanted me to play hockey. When I was in grammar school when I was twelve or thirteen years old wanted me to learn how to skate in the worst way so he built in our backyard a skating rink. We had that skating rink for twelve years. I remember flooding below zero nights and me helping him. Snow storms shoveling we couldn't afford a snow blower so cleaning of the rink. So the kids from the neighborhood from Guardian Angels School would come and play hockey. Five guys on each team, it was a pretty good size rink. And it got so popular that I had to take a list to school and say "Okay it's your turn your turn your turn" because so many kids wanted to play. It was such a popular place because of my dad. And I learned how to play hockey and I turned out to be a decent hockey player. Not the best but decent. Played for the local Maroons team the first youth hockey team and finally hung up my skates at forty five years old. After two back surgeries that was enough. My wife said "You have to live for a living. You can't afford to get hurt" and I said "Yes, dear." (laughing)

24:10 – LC: And after all that planning for those hockey games they lived right across the street from one of the Catholic churches and Dennis was an alter boy and in the middle of the games his mother would come out and say "Dennis, you have to go serve Mass." So he was the one who didn't get to play and everyone else did.

DC: Yup, because Saturday mornings they would have weddings or funerals and the priest was stuck. Back in my day alter boys were a big thing. So the priest would call, the church was right across the street, "Can Dennis do a funeral" and I would be out there playing hockey with my buddies and my mom would be

“Dennis, you have to go do a funeral!” and I was like “Aw, mom.” Great memories of that. We still talk about it with my parents, they are still alive. Reminisce about the old times.

Q: (Directed towards Laurie) Any stories from you?

LC - No.

Q: NO? Okay. Josh?

Q: (Josh) Not right now. I'm drawing a blank.

Q: Well, I'll ask the question you always ask and we'll end with this. This project is looking at preserving the last 100 years of Berlin history. What would you like to see preserved for the future? Could be anything.

25:57 – LC: It's our wooded areas. Our hiking, mountains, we need to preserve the wildlife there.

Q: Was that a big part of your growing up. The mountains. The wildlife?

LC: It was. And now my husband and daughter and even my grandson who is fourteen months old, hike. They hike as often as they can almost every weekend. It's wonderful it's beautiful. It's something you can do as a family and we need to preserve that.

26:40 – DC: Main Street. Right up to riverside drive. Fix it up. Spend some money in here. Some revenue in here. The mill site as it is now, that one stack that one building, get with it or level it. Hard to say.

LC: We would like to see Main Street vibrant once again.

Q: Well, hope for the future. It sounds like the college is doing wonderful things for the community. That's important. I want to thank you again for taking time to speak with us. We will keep you informed about the progress and hopefully we will have some articles in the newspaper and let people know what is going on.