



Berkshire Historical Society at Herman Melville's Arrowhead
780 Holmes Rd, Pittsfield, MA 01201 | berkshirehistory.org

Invisible Community Project
in partnership with
Housatonic Heritage Oral History

Clarence Gunn
Recorded: March 3, 1998
0:00:00 to 0:30:30

- Elaine Gunn:** This is Elaine Gunn speaking. Today's date is March 3rd, 1998. I am interviewing Clarence S. Gunn, Jr. for our oral history project. Thank you for allowing us to do this for the Invisible Community Project, Clarence. Would you please tell us your name and give us your nickname if you have one.
- Clarence Gunn:** Clarence Gunn.
- Elaine Gunn:** You have a nickname?
- Clarence Gunn:** Moe.
- Elaine Gunn:** Have you been called Moe or Clarence most of your life?
- Clarence Gunn:** Moe.
- Elaine Gunn:** By just family or family and friends or...
- Clarence Gunn:** Family and friends. Both.
- Elaine Gunn:** I'd like to ask you some information about your family background. Who were your parents?
- 0:01:00
- Clarence Gunn:** Florence Gunn was my mother. Clarence Gunn was my father.
- Elaine Gunn:** Can you tell me where they were born?
- Clarence Gunn:** My father was born in Stockbridge, Mass. My mother was born in Virginia.
- Elaine Gunn:** You remember what part of Virginia your mother was born in?
- Clarence Gunn:** Petersburg.
- Elaine Gunn:** Why did she come to Massachusetts?
- Clarence Gunn:** Oh, I don't know. My father met her and they got married and she came up here.

Elaine Gunn: Do you know where they met?

Clarence Gunn: No. I don't.

Elaine Gunn: Were you born in Massachusetts?

Clarence Gunn: I was born in Torrington, Connecticut.

Elaine Gunn: So then it stands to reason that perhaps your parents met in Connecticut?

Clarence Gunn: Could be.

Elaine Gunn: Or do you suppose your father visited Virginia and brought your mother up to Connecticut?

Clarence Gunn: He must've gone down there cause I don't think she came up here by herself.

0:02:01

Elaine Gunn: You know who your grandparents were? For instance your father's parents.

Clarence Gunn: Oh...

Elaine Gunn: Martin. Was your grandfather's name Martin?

Clarence Gunn: Martin Gunn. My grandmother's name was Sada [sp].

Elaine Gunn: Do you know where they were born?

Clarence Gunn: No. I don't.

Elaine Gunn: Where did they live?

Clarence Gunn: They lived in Stockbridge, Mass.

Elaine Gunn: What about your mother's parents? Anything about your mother's parents?

Clarence Gunn: I never heard much about...she never talked about her parents. So I don't know. I don't know who they were.

Elaine Gunn: How long have you lived here in Massachusetts?

0:03:02

Clarence Gunn: I came from Torrington when I was about a half a year old and I've been here the rest of my life.

Elaine Gunn: Which is?

- Clarence Gunn:** I'm 76 now, so I must be talkin' about 75 years.
- Elaine Gunn:** So you came as an infant or a toddler with your parents from Torrington, Connecticut.
- Clarence Gunn:** Yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** You have any brothers or sisters?
- Clarence Gunn:** I had two sisters and one brother.
- Elaine Gunn:** Their names? What were your sisters' names?
- Clarence Gunn:** My sister's name was Anita Gunn. And Betty Gunn. My brother's name was Joseph Gunn.
- Elaine Gunn:** Are they all still living?
- Clarence Gunn:** No. Both of my sisters are dead and my brother, Joseph, lives in Springfield, Mass.
- 0:04:04
- Elaine Gunn:** How long have your sisters been deceased?
- Clarence Gunn:** One died at age 17. My other sister, Betty, died...
- Elaine Gunn:** Recently?
- Clarence Gunn:** Recently.
- Elaine Gunn:** Seven years ago or something? Was she married?
- Clarence Gunn:** Uh-huh. She was married to a fellow that she met at school. Kenny Coppman[sp].
- Elaine Gunn:** The school was...the school that they met...
- Clarence Gunn:** They met at where they were going—both went to school there. Tuskegee...
- 0:05:00
- Elaine Gunn:** Fisk.
- Clarence Gunn:** Fisk! Fisk College.
- Elaine Gunn:** Now your sister, Betty, and her husband—did they live in the area or did they live someplace else?
- Clarence Gunn:** They came up from school and lived here shortly. Then they moved to Boston, Mass.

Elaine Gunn: Did anybody else live with your family when you were growing up?

Clarence Gunn: I had a...no. Nobody lived with us.

Elaine Gunn: Are you or were you married?

Clarence Gunn: I'm married. Yes.

Elaine Gunn: Any children?

Clarence Gunn: I have five.

Elaine Gunn: Can you give me your spouse's name?

Clarence Gunn: Elaine Gunn.

Elaine Gunn: And your spouse's occupation?

Clarence Gunn: She was a teacher.

0:06:00

Elaine Gunn: Now?

Clarence Gunn: She retired.

Elaine Gunn: You 'member how you met?

Clarence Gunn: Well, I was in the Army. When I was out of the Army I met her in Barrington. She was a friend of my sister's.

Elaine Gunn: Do you belong to a church?

Clarence Gunn: I belong to the A.M.E. Zion Church.

Elaine Gunn: You have any special memories of church gatherings when you were growing up?

Clarence Gunn: No. None.

Elaine Gunn: Picnics or...

Clarence Gunn: No. We didn't have any picnics when I was growing up.

Elaine Gunn: No special occasions, events at church like Tom Thumb weddings or anything like that?

0:07:02

Clarence Gunn: No.

Elaine Gunn: You don't remember or they didn't have any?

- Clarence Gunn:** I don't remember.
- Elaine Gunn:** You must remember family reunions and funerals at that time growing up?
- Clarence Gunn:** Yeah. We have a family reunion every year.
- Elaine Gunn:** Is this a large occasion for your family?
- Clarence Gunn:** Yeah. Quite a few of 'em come. Most all of them come one time or the other.
- Elaine Gunn:** Has religion played a large part in your life?
- Clarence Gunn:** No. I'm not too much.
- Elaine Gunn:** Are you a member of any civic or community organization?
- 0:08:03
- Clarence Gunn:** I'm a member of the [0:08:09], Veterans of Foreign Wars, and that's about...
- Elaine Gunn:** Which war were you in?
- Clarence Gunn:** World War II.
- Elaine Gunn:** You 'member how long you were in World War II?
- Clarence Gunn:** I was in the Army about three years.
- Elaine Gunn:** And you were drafted or did you enlist?
- Clarence Gunn:** I was drafted.
- Elaine Gunn:** Where did you go to school?
- Clarence Gunn:** I went to...right in Barrington. [0:08:48] School and then to...graduated out of Searles High School.
- Elaine Gunn:** You 'member anything about your school experiences? Any memories? Anything at all about school?
- 0:09:02
- Clarence Gunn:** No. I haven't got too many memories of this. Go on.
- Elaine Gunn:** You have any special teachers?
- Clarence Gunn:** I had one favorite teacher, I think. That was Ms. Cannon. I think it was third grade.

Elaine Gunn: You 'member anything special about her that you liked? Was she kind or just...

Clarence Gunn: Well, she was kind.

Elaine Gunn: Well, that's something that you can remember...your teacher's name. Such a long time ago. Tell me about the jobs that you held throughout your life.

0:10:03

Clarence Gunn: I worked at Great Barrington Manufacturing Company. I went there after my father died. I think it was 1979 while I was still in school. I worked half the time, after school. Then when I graduated I started working full-time there. I worked there until '64.

Elaine Gunn: In the meantime you went into the service.

Clarence Gunn: Service. I went into the service in '43, '42, and got out in '45 and went back to the job.

0:11:04

Elaine Gunn: And stayed there until...

Clarence Gunn: '64.

Elaine Gunn: Why did you leave in 1964?

Clarence Gunn: They closed up the plant.

Elaine Gunn: Was it a special kind of job that you had that you liked working there or did you just stay there for making a living?

Clarence Gunn: Yeah. I worked there for so long. I worked in the shipping department, shippin' things out. I stayed right there. After they closed I was down there finishing, I was the last one to work down there keepin' the furnace goin' and shippin' out whatever the orders were until they got everything out of there.

0:12:08

Elaine Gunn: And then what did you do?

Clarence Gunn: Then I started workin' for the state. State of Massachusetts. Maintenance on the roads.

Elaine Gunn: How long did you work for the state of Massachusetts?

Clarence Gunn: I worked for the state for 20 years.

Elaine Gunn: And then?

- Clarence Gunn:** Then I retired.
- Elaine Gunn:** What kind of job—you said you worked as maintenance and then...
- Clarence Gunn:** Maintenance. Yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** Takin' care of the roads.
- Clarence Gunn:** I was a workin' foreman on the state.
- 0:13:00
- Elaine Gunn:** I want to talk a little bit about your childhood memories, the kinds of games you played as a child and that kinda thing. Remember those?
- Clarence Gunn:** I liked baseball, basketball, football. I played all of them.
- Elaine Gunn:** You do any winter sports at all other than basketball, indoor sports? Any outdoor sports for the winter?
- Clarence Gunn:** No. I used to swim, but just swimmin' for the fun of it.
- Elaine Gunn:** That was sort of a summertime...did you ice skate or ski? Any of those things?
- Clarence Gunn:** I ice skated, but not much skiin'. Just used to ski a little bit, but not too much.
- Elaine Gunn:** Did you ever do any recitation in school or church or anything when you were growing up? Any recitations? Do you ever recite anything? Poems or...
- 0:14:03
- Clarence Gunn:** No. Never.
- Elaine Gunn:** Never did any of that? What kinds of chores did you do in the household when you were growing up? What kind of household chores that your parents had you...
- Clarence Gunn:** I had to take care of our room, clean up our room. Wash dishes sometimes. Help clean up the rest of the house.
- Elaine Gunn:** Did your mother work?
- Clarence Gunn:** Yeah. My mother did housework. She went out and worked.
- Elaine Gunn:** You said that your father died apparently when you all children were still at home and not grown yet. Do you know what happened? How did he happen to...

Clarence Gunn: He was killed in a car accident. 1978.

0:15:02

Elaine Gunn: So, then you children and mother were left without a father in the household. Did you have to help earn money for your family at that time?

Clarence Gunn: Well, I got a job right after that down to the Great Barrington Manufacturing Company. I helped my mother.

Elaine Gunn: Can you think of any valuable lessons you learned from your parents when you were growing up? What kinds of things did your mother and father teach you about?

Clarence Gunn: Oh. My mother was always wanting to make sure that we didn't do anything that was wrong and kept us under control pretty well. All of us.

0:16:01

Elaine Gunn: Are these some of the same values that you have imparted to your own children?

Clarence Gunn: Oh, yeah. And they all turned out good.

Elaine Gunn: Did your parents teach you about the treatment of older folks? How to treat older folks? You have older folks in the family.

Clarence Gunn: Oh, yeah. My mother always wanted us to be very respectful to older people and take time out, talk to 'em, and do whatever we could for 'em.

Elaine Gunn: There must've been some discipline in your household. Which parent was the disciplinarian? Which one? Your mother or your father?

Clarence Gunn: My mother was the strictest one of the two. My father would always follow along with her though. So, that was the way it was.

0:17:07

Elaine Gunn: You 'member some of those methods that they used? What did they use to discipline you?

Clarence Gunn: They just talked to us mostly. It wasn't too much of anything else.

- Elaine Gunn:** In other words they didn't use whippings or things like that to discipline you?
- Clarence Gunn:** No, no. They'd find other ways. You'd be sent to your room or couldn't go out. It wasn't much whippin' I think. During my lifetime I've had two whippins'. That was about it.
- Elaine Gunn:** Remember any of the stories you heard when you were growing up?
- 0:18:00
- Elaine Gunn:** Just any kind of stories at all about things that happened perhaps in your neighborhood and your town or anything that you remember that you could pass on or humorous stories or sad stories or funny stories? Any kind of anything that...
- Clarence Gunn:** I can't remember way back then. It could've been, but my memory's kind of fadin' a little...that I believe.
- Elaine Gunn:** Some children earned a little money by having a paper route or making things to sell at home or anything like that. Did you ever do anything like that?
- Clarence Gunn:** I used to sell magazines and do odd jobs, shovelin' walks, mowin' lawns, things like that.
- 0:19:01
- Clarence Gunn:** Caddyin'. I caddied quite a bit when I got old enough, about 12 years old you [0:19:08] to caddy. I'd pick up change like that.
- Elaine Gunn:** Your family lived where in Great Barrington?
- Clarence Gunn:** My family lived on Rosseter Street. 27 Rosseter Street.
- Elaine Gunn:** Now how long did you live in that house?
- Clarence Gunn:** When we came to Barrington we moved into the house and I stayed there until I got married.
- Elaine Gunn:** What year was that?
- Clarence Gunn:** I got married in '51.
- Elaine Gunn:** Were you the last member of your family, of the children, to live in that house? Your own siblings? Your brothers and sisters.
- 0:20:06
- Clarence Gunn:** I was the last one. My sister and her husband came up there and they stayed in there until they moved to Boston.

Elaine Gunn: You said your mother worked out and did domestic work, but your mother was also—she did a lot of cooking didn't she?

Clarence Gunn: Yeah. She was a good cook. She used to cook rolls and all different things like that.

Elaine Gunn: What was your favorite recipes when you were—foods that your mother cooked when you were growing up? Remember?

Clarence Gunn: Well. I used to like her bread, rolls, and most everything she cooked.

Elaine Gunn: You didn't have any special foods?

Clarence Gunn: I didn't have any really special foods.

0:21:03

Elaine Gunn: Your grandmother lived in Stockbridge. Do you remember visiting her house much? Your grandparents?

Clarence Gunn: Yeah. I used to go up there quite a bit.

Elaine Gunn: What did you do when you went up there?

Clarence Gunn: We used to...they had a brook runnin' right by the house. We used to go out there and try to spear fish and then played around the yard. We used to like to go up there.

Elaine Gunn: You had an aunt and uncle who lived in Lenox?

Clarence Gunn: I had my aunt, [0:21:42] Van Allen. She lived in Lenox and we used to go up there in the summertime. Her husband had a [0:21:53] business and horses.

0:21:59

Clarence Gunn: They had horses, cows, chickens. A regular farm. They used to raise the farm. I used to help milk the cows. I had a good time up there.

Elaine Gunn: Did you have special family times or it was just you children? Did you just have special family times at that farm in Lenox or it was children going up there and...

Clarence Gunn: Well, my cousins used to come up there quite a bit. Sometimes we would all be up there at one time. We used to play and had dogs runnin' around and play. We had quite a time up there.

Elaine Gunn: Do you have any favorite hobbies? What do you like to do most? What did you like to do maybe that you don't do anymore?

0:23:02

Clarence Gunn: Well, I used to like to play golf. I played quite a bit of golf down at the Barrington school and out to The Egremont Inn.

Elaine Gunn: Was that the only hobby that you had?

Clarence Gunn: Well, that was about all that I did then, but I'd go off and that was about it.

Elaine Gunn: Did you play on any of the local teams that they used to have around for various sporting activities?

Clarence Gunn: I used to play basketball with the team they used to call [0:23:50]. It was like a town team anyhow, but it didn't have too many...no other team like them goin' there.

0:24:04

Elaine Gunn: [0:24:05]—was that a basketball team or a baseball team?

Clarence Gunn: Well, we played baseball. We played in the league in the baseball. Basketball we used to play up at the old Town Hall. They had a court up there.

Elaine Gunn: Were these all Black players or white players or a mixture of both or what?

Clarence Gunn: It was a mixture of both.

Elaine Gunn: Speaking of Black and white boys and girls in town and growing up and going to school—were there many Blacks in your school, in your classes, when you were growing up?

0:25:00

Clarence Gunn: There wasn't too many. One or two were in my class.

Elaine Gunn: How did you all get along?

Clarence Gunn: Got along well. Very well. After school we used to go up to the houses and play football or whatever games we wanted to for most every day after school if it was nice weather. We had a good time.

Elaine Gunn: So you didn't have any social problems with races?

Clarence Gunn: No. I never had any.

Elaine Gunn: As children.

Clarence Gunn: No.

Elaine Gunn: Has that carried over into your adult life?

Clarence Gunn: Yeah. It has. I haven't never had no racial problems while I was in Barrington.

0:26:02

Elaine Gunn: You have any other memories of Berkshire County? Now you lived in a small town in Great Barrington. To socialize you said you didn't have any racial problems, but as you got older how did you socialize? Did you stay in the town? Did you go elsewhere? Do you have any memories of just being in Berkshire County? Or was your whole life centered around Great Barrington?

Clarence Gunn: Well, we used to go to Pittsfield quite a bit and Sheffield and Hudson and different places like that.

Elaine Gunn: Why did you go to these places?

Clarence Gunn: Well, in Pittsfield we used to go up there. They used to have parties almost every week. Pittsfield, Williamstown, North Adams.

0:27:00

Clarence Gunn: We used to go quite a bit up there. Sheffield. They had a place down there that you could dance. We used to go down there to dance and meet girls. From there we went quite a bit to different places.

Elaine Gunn: Well, you've given us a lot of information. Anything else you want to add before we stop?

Clarence Gunn: No.

Elaine Gunn: You didn't mention where your children are. Are your children in the area or are they out of the area?

Clarence Gunn: I have five children. I have a girl. The oldest girl is Tina and she's a nurse. She's workin' in Florida.

0:28:06

Clarence Gunn: Next oldest is another girl. She's an accountant. She works in Virginia. Then I have a son, Clay. He's the closest one here near us and he works in Pittsfield. He's a farmer. Then I have a son, Norman, or Scott as they call him. He's a lawyer and he works in Texas. I have another daughter, Tracey. She's the youngest. She's married to an Army sergeant.

0:29:03

Clarence Gunn: She lives in Illinois. That's all the children.

Elaine Gunn: Well, I thank you very much. Hopefully you'll let me come back if I need to and sort of do a follow-up. Is that OK?

Clarence Gunn: Yeah. It's OK.

Elaine Gunn: Thanks again.

Clarence S. Gunn is a 77 year-old man who is very active and is apparently in good health. He has consented to a follow-up if need be. Thank you very much.

0:30:00

0:30:30 *Recording ends*