

Martha Pellerin - "I kind of grew up overnight"
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Martha Pellerin: "...we were kind of fortunate where we were because there were a substantial group of people who also immigrated to Barre in late 50's, early 60's. And these were all people from the area, most of them, not all of them, but most of them were from the area my parents were from. And it wasn't until my dad died that I realized that dad had "sponsored" a lot of these people. In other words, gave them a place to stay for a month or two before and helped them get a job and helped them understand the system and that kind of thing, which I never realized until he died. And at his wake people would come through the line and many of the men that came through shook my hand and said, "You know if it weren't for your dad I wouldn't be here today." So it was really something to find, to discover about your father.

My dad was the 5th, I think, of our extended family to pass away in about a year's time. And it really impacted on me because the people that happened to die that particular year—for some reason I was suddenly very aware of how the family gatherings and the soirées were going to be significantly different because they weren't going to be there. It just happened to be people that really made an impression on me growing up.

The people like mon oncle [uncle] Henri for instance, passed away. He was Dominican brother up in Lewiston, Maine. And he used to tell some pretty neat stories. He was very animated. He just added a lot when he was at a party. You know, sometimes you go to a party there were certain people you hope were going to be there because those are the people that really, I don't know, they add this atmosphere to it, you know what I mean? So the relatives that died, including my dad that year, were those kind of people for me. If I was going to go to a soirée I'd always hope that they were going to be there, that kind of thing. So suddenly I kind of grew up over night when that struck me that, geeze...

Plus when my dad died in February we had just gone through the holidays. So all of those family gatherings were so fresh in my mind and they seemed a little different that year because of people that were gone. And then when my dad died it was like, "Wow, now what is it going to be like?" I can't rely on my dad to kind of fill in the gaps that these other folks had left behind because he's gone now. So suddenly I realized that if my generation didn't wake up and smell the roses that all of those wonderful experiences were going to be gone forever, and that we had to make our own.

So again it's not like a unique experience, I'm sure other people experience it too. But what's I guess unique about it for me is that I turned it into a full time obsession! And ever since then I've been collecting songs and doing oral histories and creating programs, just an experience that just significantly changed my life. I was at...I guess at a point in my life where I was ready to do something I guess, and then this happened to be the thing that I was meant to do, and I did it, and continue to do it. And it's very satisfying to me."