

EI-1039

**MARIAN WATKINGS DOWNING MATTHEWS
BIRTHDATE: OCTOBER 11, 1916
INTERVIEW DATE: MARCH 11, 1999
AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 82
RUNNING TIME: 47:00
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE
RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE
INTERVIEW LOCATION: SEMINOLE, FLORIDA
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: HELEN HENWOOD**

**WALES, 1929
AGE 12**

**SHIP: AQUITANIA
PORT: SOUTHAMPTON
RESIDENCES:
• WALES: PORT TALBOT
• U.S: CLEVELAND, OHIO; EUCLID, OHIO: SEMINOLE, FLORIDA**

LEVINE: Today is March 11th, 1999 and I'm here in—what is the name of—

MATTHEWS: Seminole.

LEVINE: Seminole, which is—is—it's kind of part of St. Petersburg, right, but
it's—

MATTHEWS: More Largo.

LEVINE: More Largo, part of Largo.

EI-1039/MATTHEWS

MATTHEWS: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Seminole, Florida, and I'm here with Marian Matthews, who came from Wales when she was twelve years of age on the Aquitania and that was in 1929, in July.

MATTHEWS: That's right.

LEVINE: Okay, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Well, I'm delighted to be here.

MATTHEWS: Well, I'm happy you're here, too.

LEVINE: And I'm looking forward to anything you can remember. So I'll start out asking questions, and then whatever you can add.

MATTHEWS: All right.

LEVINE: Would be wonderful. Your—the name that you had when you were born, what—what were you born as?

MATTHEWS: Marian Watkins.

LEVINE: Okay, and have you ever had any other names besides Watkins and Matthews?

MATTHEWS: Yes, my first husband's name was Kenneth Downing.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay. And your date of birth.

MATTHEWS: October 11th, 1916.

LEVINE: And, let's see. We have the Aquitania. Okay. Now, where in Wales were you born?

MATTHEWS: I was born in Port Talbot, which is in South Wales.

LEVINE: Now, did you live in the same place up until you left when you were twelve years of age?

MATTHEWS: Yes, I did, in the same house at 31 Margam Terrace.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, can you describe that house?

MATTHEWS: Yes, it was a big house. It had about five bedrooms and we didn't have a bathroom, but way down the back of the yard was, as you call it—you know what you call it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: But it was pull chain. It was not, you know, a dirty place. (Laughs)
And it was just a big lovely home.

LEVINE: Now, was it—was it one story or—

MATTHEWS: No, it was two stories, brick and—because there were five children in the home and my three brothers, my sister and myself and my mother and father and my grandmother. My grandmother Reese lived with us, and so it was a big home.

LEVINE: Now, your Grandmother Reese, was that your mother's maiden name?

MATTHEWS: That was my mother's mother.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Now, what do you remember about her, when you think about her?

MATTHEWS: About her?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MATTHEWS: All I remember for her is sitting in her chair with her little cape on and I don't know as I ever heard more than ten words out of her. She never seemed to talk, but my mother took good care of her.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: I can remember when she died and so-forth, you know, but other than that, I have—like I say, I don't recall her speaking too much.

LEVINE: Did she—of the ten words, are there any that you can remember—

MATTHEWS: No, no.

LEVINE: What she said?

MATTHEWS: Except my mother would tell stories about my two brothers. One was a thrifty one and when he'd get his money at the week – at the end of the week, and the boys would get their money and she'd tell my

mother a few days later, "I gave So and So so much coin." (Phone rings)

LEVINE: Wait. We're going to pause. [tape off/on] Okay, we're resuming here after a phone call. You were talking about your Grandmother Reese and—

MATTHEWS: Yeah, well, she said to my mother, "I gave money to the boy," and my mother said, "Which one?" "Oh," she said, "not the tall one, the other one." That's the only way she would—could distinguish between the two boys and we knew which one was the spender. (Laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, did—was your mother's family from the same area in South Wales as you lived?

MATTHEWS: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: And your father's family?

MATTHEWS: Yes, uh-huh.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: Two little towns apart from where we were living, but it's all in the same area.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: So. In fact, I have a poem written by my grandfather.

LEVINE: Oh.

MATTHEWS: And it's called "Dyffryn fach," and it means son of the Dyffryn—son of the valley, rather, and he wrote about his eyesight. I've got copies and I made copies for my brothers and my sister, so they'd have that.

LEVINE: Oh, isn't that lovely.

MATTHEWS: Yeah, and I had it translated. It was all in Welsh.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: And a friend from Sarasota, Rhiannon Hardy, she translated for me and I had them made up for the family.

LEVINE: Wonderful. I'm wondering may—it would be lovely—would you want to read it in Welsh and then translate?

MATTHEWS: Oh, I can't read it in Welsh.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, maybe we'll have it in Welsh, but you could read it—

MATTHEWS: No, I don't have it. I returned it to a cousin in Wales.

LEVINE: Oh.

MATTHEWS: Who sent it to me.

LEVINE: I see.

MATTHEWS: And I promised I'd get it back to her, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MATTHEWS: So I just have the English translation.

LEVINE: Well, that would be nice. Would you want to read it on the tape? Okay. Let me just stop a second. [tape off/on] Okay, we're resuming here and Mrs. Matthews has a poem written by her Grandfather Watkins—that's her father's father—and she's going to read it in the English translation. So whenever you're ready.

MATTHEWS: Okay, this was 1933. "The eye of the mind sees far. Thank you for seeing so clear, the fields and the world from my youth. See bluebells lift their hearts under the smile of the pleasant sun. I was given a clear eye to see from God while on my journey. Our four twenty four years, so pleasant to see His work. A beautiful sight was to see the sun, the moon and numerous stars, to see the work of His holy fingers, so alive in the heights above. Strange sight was to see the sea and its waves continually boiling, but to see His great love to man, is bigger than the perils of the sea. My eye failed on the journey to give a clear sight. I can only thank you now for the sight I had so long. Though I nearly lost my sight of the biggest things of the world, the eye of the mind sees far. It is clearly continually. It sees far beyond the distant hills, where the heavenly host resides. I'll see the divine Jesus so beautiful that died on Calvary. May I not tire now, as long as fog is on my eye. The eye of the mind sees far, the dwelling place above. It sees millions of saints so pure and clean. The feast within the curtain of heaven—they feast within the curtain of heaven. It sees the glory of the King of heaven and the crown upon His head. Thomas Watkins, Dyffryn Fach, Son of the Valley."

LEVINE: Wow, that's beautiful.

MATTHEWS: He was a very religious man.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: A beautiful man.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember him?

MATTHEWS: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: From—from Wales?

MATTHEWS: Mm-hmm.

LEVINE: How do you remember him?

MATTHEWS: I remember him because I took piano lessons across the street from his home and I would stop there every Saturday morning going up the back gate, sit with my grandpa, talk and then go out the front door, take my music lesson, come back in and talk to him some more and then come home.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: Oh, he was a beautiful man.

LEVINE: And when you—when you talked with him, what were the kinds of things that you remember?

MATTHEWS: Ah, I don't know. He always held you. He held you close and he talked and of course I was young and fidgety, I guess. I'd get off his lap.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: But, no, he was—he was a beautiful man.

LEVINE: Wow, and now, did you have—did he have a wife? Did you have a grandmother on that side?

MATTHEWS: No, she had passed away way before I was born and he was living with his daughter and son-in-law and their children. But they also had a big home because they were quite a family.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: But—

LEVINE: What had your grandfather done for work before he—

MATTHEWS: He—he was not in the mines. I for—I really can't tell you, but he was not in the mines. He had a good position, from what I'd been told, you know, as a child, which went right over my head, I guess. Because he died in 1933, so you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MATTHEWS: No, you—I'm sorry. He wrote this in 1933. I think it was about '39, 1939 when he passed away.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you had a grandfather on one side and a grandmother on the other side.

MATTHEWS: On the other, that's right.

LEVINE: And then you had aunts and uncles and cousins?

MATTHEWS: Oh, yes, lots of aunts and uncles.

LEVINE: So you had quite a—quite a large extended family growing up.

MATTHEWS: Yes, I did.

LEVINE: Early on.

MATTHEWS: Right, right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: And as far as I know, I think I'm the last one.

LEVINE: Wow.

MATTHEWS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, the town you were born in.

MATTHEWS: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: What was it called again?

MATTHEWS: Port Talbot.

LEVINE: Port Talbot.

MATTHEWS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Can you describe Port Talbot?

MATTHEWS: Oh, yeah, right. It's—Station Road was the busy street and we had a beautiful river, the River Afan running through it, and it was a steel mill town, as well as coal mines on the outside of the town. But the main works in Port Talbot was the Port Talbot Steel Mills, and that's where my father worked. And he was a puddler, as they call it. Now, what that meant, I don't know, and the reason I found that out, when I was back for the investiture, a friend from Euclid was there visiting other—her relatives and I mentioned it to a cousin and he said, "Well, let's go down." So I went to visit her. Then the husband of the—came home from wherever he'd been and his wife introduced me and at one time he had been Mayor of Port Talbot and he turned to me and he says, "What was your father's name?" and I told him, "John Watkins." "Oh," he said, "he taught me my job in the steel mill." So I got to know somebody that my dad worked with.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: So.

LEVINE: Oh, that's nice. Now you mentioned you remember your Grandmother Reese's funeral.

MATTHEWS: Yeah.

LEVINE: How—how do—could you describe that?

MATTHEWS: Yes, I can describe that. She had been very ill and my sister had made me a new—my sister Doris had made me a new dress and the morning—and I'd had it on that morning and my mother said to me, "Run and tell Uncle Edmond Grandma has gone." Well, as I went down our backyard and opened the gate, my dress caught on the latch and I tore my new dress. So I can remember that day like—because I was afraid to say "I've torn my dress." But I went and told my uncle and then my mother said it was all right that I had torn it, not to worry.

LEVINE: Hmm, and how about the funeral and everything? Were you a part of that as a child or not?

MATTHEWS: No, I can remember that, because I was sent down, further down Margam Terrace to a neighbor who had a child and I was told to stay there until somebody came for me because they didn't want me to see, you know, the procession and all of that. But I wanted to, but the neighbor wouldn't take—because they marched. You know, they walked to the cemetery.

LEVINE: Yeah, describe how they did the funeral -- [unclear].

MATTHEWS: Well, from what I know, they follow the hearse. The family and friends and that did all the way to the cemetery and they didn't—they thought I was too young for that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now, where did you fit in the birth order of—of your brothers and sisters?

MATTHEWS: I was the youngest.

LEVINE: You were the youngest, and you had—

MATTHEWS: I had three brothers and one sister.

LEVINE: One sister, and why don't you name them on the—

MATTHEWS: Okay, my brother Gwynn was the eldest. My brother Edmond was next. Then Doris, then my brother Cyril and then myself.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and your mother, her—her name.

MATTHEWS: Alice Jane Watkins. Reese Watkins. (Laughs)

LEVINE: Reese Watkins. And your father's name?

MATTHEWS: Was John.

LEVINE: John. Great. Um, what did your mother and father do for a social life?

MATTHEWS: I sure do. Singers. They—they were both well known in Port Talbot area for singing and between that and the choirs that they belonged to, and of course, I had to go to the rehearsal because there was nobody home to take care of me. So—but they—they were so often called on for singing.

LEVINE: Can you—can you describe the rehearsals at all? What was it like?

MATTHEWS: Yeah. Well, I would sit there, you know, and—oh, I can't—Tom was his first name, but—the conductor, I can't think of his last name. And I fidgeted. You – you -- I know I did. You know, my mother would give me a look and I'd sit still for a while, but I had to spend the whole time there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, were they involved in church choirs, too?

MATTHEWS: Oh, yes, very much so. The Wern Chapel and that's W-E-R-N Chapel, and when I went there—I was back for the investiture in '69 and I went. My cousin asked me did I want to go to their church or did I want to go to my old church. I said, "I'd like to see it." It was a beautiful place inside, and believe it or not, we came out in, like I say, '29. Now, this is the investiture is '60—'69. But anyway, sitting to my right was the contralto soloist that sang with my mother and father, and so I got to see her. Of course, I didn't remember her, but I knew about her.

LEVINE: She remembered. Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: So.

LEVINE: Isn't that lovely?

MATTHEWS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, what—the Wern Church—the chapel, what religion was the family?

MATTHEWS: Congregational.

LEVINE: Congregational.

MATTHEWS: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Were there any religious days that you observed that you can remember?

MATTHEWS: Oh, just—yeah, the ordinary. I mean Thanks—I mean Christmas and Easter and that sort of church events.

LEVINE: Were there—was there anything different about them there than—than in this country?

MATTHEWS: No, I don't think so.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How about—is it Saint David? Who's the patron saint?

MATTHEWS: Patron Saint is Saint David.

LEVINE: Saint David.

MATTHEWS: And he has—there's a cathedral in Wales and he's the Patron Saint of Wales and we celebrate his death, actually.

LEVINE: And what do you do?

MATTHEWS: March the 1st we have banq—we have banquets and song festivals. And that's the way we honor Saint David.

LEVINE: And what is Saint David's story? Why is it that Saint David is the—

MATTHEWS: He went and he was preaching the word of God, and that's how he traveled all over, preaching the word of God.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, and in this country, do people of Welsh—

MATTHEWS: We celebrate every year.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: We just had a banquet. Now our Welsh Society just had their banquet, and usually it's—there's a society in Sarasota and they have theirs. They had theirs on March the 1st. We had ours on the previous Friday and—so I can't think of anything else.

LEVINE: Hmm—and now how about you as a child, can you remember what kinds of things you did for fun?

MATTHEWS: Oh, well, you played outside with the other children on the street and our school had little trips that you could take, you know. And I remember going to Anne Hathaway's cottage in Stratford-on-Avon, you know, and that was a great adventure.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MATTHEWS: So.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, and how about duties or chores, did you have any of those?

MATTHEWS: No. (They laugh)

LEVINE: Because you were the—you were the baby? Is that right?

MATTHEWS: I was the youngest. Doris had her chores. She had to clean all the brass on the—on our mantel in the kitchen and every place. You know, anything that was brass, that was her job on Saturday morning.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and how about your brothers?

MATTHEWS: Well, they was—my—I don't know what they did. Two of them were working, you know, and Cyril was the youngest one at home.

LEVINE: I see.

MATTHEWS: And he—he had certain things to do, I imagine.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: I didn't pay much attention. He and I would go and get the bread from the baker. That my mother made the dough and the big bakery place would bake it, and then we would go and bring them, the different number of loaves home that she had—you know, had baking there. And of course we'd pinch a few crusts off it and get bawled out when we got home, "Leave the bread alone!"

LEVINE: Can you remember that, the bakery and how people—

MATTHEWS: Yeah, I mean—

LEVINE: Went about getting their bread?

MATTHEWS: You—like my mother would make her dough, put it in the pans and I didn't take it. Maybe the older boys took it, and the baker would bake

it. I mean, all—not all the people but a lot of people had their bread made that way and then he had this long, long wooden handle—it was flat, but it would reach into the oven and pull all those loaves of bread out, you know. And so then we'd bring them home.

LEVINE: Wow. Can you remember the bakery—

MATTHEWS: I can remember—

LEVINE: The bakery—

MATTHEWS: Where it is, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: Or where it was. It probably isn't there any more.

LEVINE: Did it have a lot of ovens or—

MATTHEWS: It had two huge ovens. I don't know how many loaves he could get in each one, but there were two of them in there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was there anything else about food that was a little bit different than—than we're used to now, that you can recall?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, I don't think you eat faggots and peas.

LEVINE: Oh, no.

MATTHEWS: Faggots is made with liver and all of that and it's got a veiling, as they call it, around it. They are delicious, if you like liver.

LEVINE: And how do you—how do you eat it? I mean—

MATTHEWS: It's regular—it comes like—it would look like a big ball, you know, and just a regular meat.

LEVINE: And is it fried, sautéed?

MATTHEWS: No, it's baked somewhere. I can't remember how she made them, and I think they were—no, they were baked in the oven. So they came out. They're pretty solid on your plate, you know.

LEVINE: And then peas alongside?

MATTHEWS: And the peas and other vegetables, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Any other foods that you—that you ate?

MATTHEWS: I can't—

LEVINE: What would be like typical of—of—of—

MATTHEWS: Oh, roast beef.

LEVINE: Oh.

MATTHEWS: That's the main. That's what we liked, was the roast beef.

LEVINE: Wow.

MATTHEWS: Yeah.

LEVINE: And let's see. You went to school, I assume.

MATTHEWS: Yes.

LEVINE: What was that like and when did you go and where was it and—

MATTHEWS: Well, it was—it wasn't too far, and just a typical school. It was all in English, and just we had instead of grades, they call them standards. And I do remember that everybody in the school, you went through standard eight, I think it was, and—but you gathered in the main hall very first thing in the morning and the principal came in and gave a prayer and we sang a hymn and then we went to class.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MATTHEWS: So.

LEVINE: Now, were most people Congregationalists?

MATTHEWS: No. No, no, no. Bapt—you had them all. Baptists, everything.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: Yeah. No, no.

LEVINE: So it was a real mixed—

MATTHEWS: It was mixed, oh, yes, definitely.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: Right.

LEVINE: And is there anything else that you think of when you think of those first twelve years, that—

MATTHEWS: They were good.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: They were fun years. Yeah.

LEVINE: And when you think of yourself as a twelve year old, coming to this country, who were you? How would you describe the little girl you were?

MATTHEWS: I thought I was pretty good. (Laughs) No, I was – I was pretty confident.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: And because my mother and my sister were with me and then they were supposed to have the Traveler's Aid.

LEVINE: Well, first if you would say why was it that your family decided to come to this country—

MATTHEWS: Oh.

LEVINE: At that point.

MATTHEWS: Oh, right. That goes way back to a cousin of my mother's and she came out as a young girl, married and did rather well and she used to come back and visit. And one year she asked my oldest brother, would he like to come to America and of course he stayed with her. And he jumped, and he came. Then the following—he worked and then the following year he sent for my second oldest brother and—let me—the girl that he was to marry, Gwynedd, they came out and Gwynedd took care of the two men. My brother was married. They got married out here and then she took care of the house. Then the next year they sent for my father, my brother, Cyril and my sister-in-law's brother, Oliver, and they three came out. So she had all of them to take care of. The following year they sent for my mother and Doris and I, and that's how we all got here.

LEVINE: Wow. Now, how about starting with your—with your oldest brother, but what did they work at in Wales and what did they work at when they came to this country?

MATTHEWS: Oh, they were in the steel mills in Wales and then when they came here, they worked for Truscon Steel Company.

LEVINE: Oh, so were they doing similar—they were doing similar things?

MATTHEWS: No, it was different work. No, no, it was different work. There was like office work here and I think my brother Gwynn was on the road for them, you know, and so that's what they did when they came here to this country.

LEVINE: And where was it that—that they—that your cousin and then your oldest brother and then your next oldest brother and his wife, where did they settle?

MATTHEWS: In Cleveland.

LEVINE: In Cleveland.

MATTHEWS: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: And that's where the rest of the family went when you came.

MATTHEWS: We all came to Cleveland, right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, so—so did they actually send you a ticket when you—when it was your time and your mother and sister's?

MATTHEWS: My father handled that. I don't know how they—you know, how it was done, but they sent us the fare, the tickets or whatever. My mother had to sell the home and do all of that, and that was—of course, I was young. I didn't know what was going on, as far as the big jobs that they had to do. So.

LEVINE: Was your mother looking forward to it?

MATTHEWS: I hope so. She was fifty years old. I give her a lot of credit, you know, for uprooting like that, and—but she had a good life when she got here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: So.

LEVINE: Now, did you go through any examinations or things before you left Wales?

MATTHEWS: Health and so-forth? Oh, yeah, I had that and then we weren't—we were put in the hands of Traveler's Aid because it was Depression time and they thought that would be wiser than people taking time off from work for us to come to Cleveland that way and—but as the boat was—I'd had tests onboard ship. I had to go in and show that I could read, write, do this and that and the other, and then we were docking and as the boat pulled in, made a turn, I can see it like it was yesterday. I spotted my brother on the pier and I ran and I told my mother. She says, "No." She says, "These people are going to take care of us." I said, "Well, he's on the pier," and she was, "It must look somebody like him." But it was him and it took a long time before they would allow us off the boat to go with him, and so we did that, and we got on the train to come to Cleveland and my mother wanted a cup of tea and there was no tea on that train. Then she's coming through—we're coming like through the back ends of towns, Buffalo and that, and she turned to my brother, she said, "Is this what you brought me to?" because all she could see was the back end of everything, and the yards of the train stations and so-forth. So it didn't look very attractive to her.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, do you remember actually leaving? Was there—were there—were there people to see you off or were there parties before?

MATTHEWS: Oh, wow. Yes, there were parties for—of course, I was young but I was allowed to stay up a certain length of time. So I was in on some of it, but then the morning that we left, the depot was packed with people and some of my cousins that were, you know, still there and the depot was just packed with people to wave goodbye to us. Because out here my brother—my father had two brothers and a sister that had preceded him to America. So we did have relatives here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and do you remember what you expected, as a twelve year old?

MATTHEWS: No, I didn't know what to expect.

LEVINE: You didn't know, uh-huh. Well, the depot, in other words, were you in Port Talbot? Is that—is that when you say the depot, the train depot?

MATTHEWS: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Where you took a train and where did the train take you?

MATTHEWS: Southampton and from Southampton we left and we—the boat took off and we woke up the next morning and we were back in Southampton because the fog. They couldn't go any further.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: So we had—we lost a day.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and how about the voyage, anything that you—

MATTHEWS: It was wonderful.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: It was wonderful. I had—I had a good time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, were there other peop—you didn't know anyone else at the time, but—

MATTHEWS: Not really, no.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: No, uh-huh, but I had a real good time. There weren't too many children on the—on the ship but I had a good time. I knew the Purser quite well because he kept an eye on me. (Laughs)

END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, were you traveling third class, steerage? Were you traveling second class, pass—

MATTHEWS: Second.

LEVINE: Second.

MATTHEWS: Yeah.

LEVINE: And that's why you didn't have to go to Ellis Island?

MATTHEWS: No, I assumed it was because all the paperwork had been done and we were having—being taken care of by the Traveler's Aid and—

LEVINE: Okay.

MATTHEWS: You know, I don't—I don't really know why we didn't have to go.

LEVINE: Do you—could you tell anything that you recall about the Traveler's Aid?

MATTHEWS: Well, they were adamant they weren't going to let us off the boat. They were doing their job well because they knew that they had the job of getting us to Cleveland, but they were finally convinced, you know, and they did allow us to leave.

LEVINE: With your brother instead of with them.

MATTHEWS: Yes, uh-hmm. Right.

LEVINE: Was someone going to actually escort you, or just escort you to the train and then—

MATTHEWS: You know, I really don't know how that worked.

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

MATTHEWS: But they assured us that noth—no harm would come to us or had assured my family to do it this way, so that we would be safe.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and I—well, you were too young to know, but I mean, did they—were they a social service or did your father have to pay them or—

MATTHEWS: I would imagine there's a fee for it, but I mean they used to use it for children, you know, the Traveler's Aid for children traveling and they would do it for adults, too, who were strangers to the country.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Wow. Now, when you first got to Cleveland, do you remember what—anything that struck you as new or different?

MATTHEWS: Yes. We had a chauffeured limousine meeting us.

LEVINE: Wow.

MATTHEWS: Well, the family that instigated us coming out, the daughter had married and done very well and they had a chauffeur. So he's—and I thought everybody had that, you know. Then we go to their gorgeous home in Cleveland Heights and I thought every home had a ballroom, which they had, and—but it isn't—of course, it wasn't so. But it was very, very, very interesting.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: So.

LEVINE: And then where did you live?

MATTHEWS: We lived—they had—we came to their home in Cleveland Heights, but my father had already had a home then in Cleveland and that's where we came.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and how did—could you compare that new home in Cleveland with the home you left in Port Talbot?

MATTHEWS: Slightly smaller. Oh, you mean in Wales?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MATTHEWS: Oh.

LEVINE: Both, compare the two.

MATTHEWS: Yeah. I guess this one was smaller than the one we had in Wales.
Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: And it was wood. Ours was brick.

LEVINE: Right.

MATTHEWS: You know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: And we had a big backyard.

LEVINE: In—in Cleveland?

MATTHEWS: In Wales.

LEVINE: In Wales, I see.

MATTHEWS: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: And can you remember those first few days and weeks in Cleveland?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, I remember being sent to the school. (Laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: Enrolled in school and then the first week I was there, my mother said—gave me some money and asked me to eat lunch at school. So I said, “All right.” She had—I don’t know if she was going downtown or what, but anyway, so this one friend, Betty was her first name, said, “I’ll show you how to do it.” So I followed her through the lunch line. So she took milk. I took milk. She took something; I took the same thing. However, when I went to—I put the straw in my little milk container and I took a sip and I put my hand up in the room we were in because we had a teacher in there, you know, and she came over. She said, “What’s the matter?” I said, “My milk is sour,” and Betty started to laugh. She says, “You took”—

LEVINE: Buttermilk.

MATTHEWS: Buttermilk. Well, I’d had never had buttermilk, so you know I didn’t enjoy that. But they—they let me go and get my milk.

LEVINE: And then how was it, as far as school? Were you put in the same grade?

MATTHEWS: Yes. Equivalent to what I was.

LEVINE: And how about the language, was there any—

MATTHEWS: No, because I spoke English.

LEVINE: Right.

MATTHEWS: You know, and so the language was no problem.

LEVINE: The accent—no accent.

MATTHEWS: Except the accent was, because on my second or third day—no, my second or third week in school, at the—at a math class, she put a problem up on the board and you had to work it in your head, not write it out and I put my hand up and I said, “I can remember the answer. It was six and a harf.” So I stood up and said, “Six and a harf.” She asked me to repeat and I said it, and she said, “Now, that’s the way to say harf.” I never said “Six and a harf like that again.” I say six and a ha-a-lf.

LEVINE: (Laughs) Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: No, that—that stands out in my mind.

LEVINE: Yeah, and were your teachers good? Do you remember your early teachers?

MATTHEWS: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. No, they were good to me. Yeah. No, they were very patient and understanding.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: Really.

LEVINE: And how about were there other children, other people from Scotland in the community in which you—

MATTHEWS: You mean from Wales?

LEVINE: Scotland—Wales.

MATTHEWS: In the community that I lived?

LEVINE: In Cleveland.

MATTHEWS: Not really, but of course we had the Welsh church. We all went to the Welsh church and so that's where my friends were.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Were there a lot of other immigrant families in Cleveland at that point?

MATTHEWS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes, definitely. Right. A lot of them had preceded us, but they were still coming after we came, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. And how do you recall Cleveland in those early days that you were there?

MATTHEWS: Well, I was young. I could get around. I could take the streetcar, you know, and go and not be afraid. You know, because—but I'd go to church on Sunday morning. Sunday School and church and I had to take the streetcar and I don't think I got home until the evening

because I was always invited for lunch or some place because they knew I had to come back for the afternoon sessions in church.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: So, that was a good day.

LEVINE: Yes. Yeah, and did everyone in your family—were they happy they had come or did—

MATTHEWS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MATTHEWS: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: And nobody planned to go back?

MATTHEWS: To live?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MATTHEWS: Oh, no. We've all been back visiting.

LEVINE: Right.

MATTHEWS: But not to live.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Now, let's see. So when you think back on that—on that time now—

MATTHEWS: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Do you think coming here as a nine year old—or a twelve year old was something that helped determine the kind of person you were? Do you think that had a big impact on you later in the kind of person you became?

MATTHEWS: I don't know. That's hard to decide.

LEVINE: Yeah. I mean, changing—changing your whole world really.

MATTHEWS: Yeah, true enough. But --

LEVINE: At that age, but I suppose you were—you were a child in a family more than you were an individual coming and making those choices.

MATTHEWS: Yeah, right. Right. Yeah, it was a case of either coming or stay by yourself. (Laughs)

LEVINE: Yeah, right. (Laughs) Right. What were the best times that you had in your life?

MATTHEWS: Oh.

LEVINE: Would you say? The high -- sort of the high—

MATTHEWS: I have so many good times. Of course, meeting my husband. And my son, of course.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How did you meet your husband?

MATTHEWS: Well, there was a group in high school and we—we liked to have little parties and one time it was decided, “Why don’t we ask fellows?” I says, “I’m not doing that,” but my mother said, “Well, now, you’re very foolish. Go to the party anyway,” and she made me Welsh cakes. I said, “Well, I’ll take the Welsh cakes for them,” but I said, “I’ll be right home.” But I never got home. (Laughs) There were some nice people there and that’s where I met Kenneth. My first husband was at that party.

LEVINE: Now, was Kenneth also of Wales descent?

MATTHEWS: No, he’s of Scottish descent.

LEVINE: Scotch.

MATTHEWS: His mother was from Scotland.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh, and—and then you married. Did you work at all?

MATTHEWS: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and how many children?

MATTHEWS: I have the -- just the one boy.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and what’s your son’s name?

MATTHEWS: Kenneth Downing. Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: And let's see. How about any low points in your life? Were there times—was there a time that was not so satisfactory?

MATTHEWS: Well, it wasn't so much low as sad, when my husband died because we were at a funeral and he got ill and that was—that was it.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm. And do you—you came at the very beginning of the Depression.

MATTHEWS: Right, right.

LEVINE: Did the Depression affect your family much?

MATTHEWS: In a sense it did. Like, you know, there wasn't as much work or laid off for a little while and things like that. Of course, I was young. I still had food on the table. I had clothes on my back, you know. So I didn't really understand it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. And then did you stay in Cleveland until you came to Florida?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, I see. So—so you probably saw a lot of changes in Cleveland over the years, too.

MATTHEWS: Well, when we got married we moved to the suburbs, Euclid, Ohio, which was a village at that time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: And from there is where I came to Florida.

LEVINE: Florida, uh-huh. Uh-huh, and let's see. Can you think—when you think of your—of your Welsh background and the fact that you lived in America all the years since twelve, how do you reconcile those two sides of you?

MATTHEWS: One melds right into the other. Yes, I'm very proud of my Welsh heritage, but I'm also proud to be an American.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: Yes.

LEVINE: Now, did you personally visit Ellis Island? Is that how—

MATTHEWS: No, I don't know how my name was come about.

LEVINE: Huh. Maybe through the Welsh Society.

MATTHEWS: I don't know.

LEVINE: Because I interviewed someone on Treasure Island several years ago.

MATTHEWS: Nellie Miller? Was that her name?

LEVINE: No. I don't think so. I can't think of her name, but that doesn't ring a bell, but she took some of these questionnaires so perhaps that's how.

MATTHEWS: I wonder who that was because I lived in Treasure—

LEVINE: I can let you know. I'll let you know who that was.

MATTHEWS: Uh-hmm. Because she's still--

LEVINE: I'm pretty sure she told me about you. That's how I remember your name from—from her. I'll let you know who that was.

MATTHEWS: All right, because Nellie is still alive. She's ninety-six or ninety-seven.

LEVINE: Really, wow?

MATTHEWS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, now, how about your affiliation with the Welsh social groups since you've been in this country?

MATTHEWS: Oh.

LEVINE: Did that start early on?

MATTHEWS: Oh, yes. Like I say, when I became eighteen, my mother, my sister, my sister-in-laws, they were members of the Cleveland—of the East Cleveland Welsh Society, which supports a home for the aged in Lorraine, Ohio, and there were four clubs in the Cleveland area. They're all over the state of Ohio because they knew that—but—so I automatically joined that club. Then we have a national organization which was going on the weekend we arrived in Cleveland. It's called the National Gymanfa Ganu Association, which is the national Welsh singing association.

LEVINE: Oh.

MATTHEWS: And we have met every Labor Day weekend since 1929, except for the few year wars that they didn't travel here, and I have attended thirty-seven of those.

LEVINE: That's wonderful. Now, what happens at one of those gatherings?

MATTHEWS: Well, it's all over Labor Day weekend. We start on a Thursday and there's singing. There's—oh, what they call it? Thursday night—I had a program, but anyway, Friday night is the banquet. Saturday night is a concert and so very often it's a male voice chorus from Wales that entertain us, and then Sunday is our song festival, and we -- Sunday morning we have church. Then Sunday afternoon we start with singing our Welsh hymns. We have a songbook and then we break for a meal and then we continue on Sunday evening and we say goodbye Sunday night. Usually everybody leaves on Monday.

LEVINE: Wow.

MATTHEWS: To come home. So this will be my thirty-eighth coming up over Labor Day this year.

LEVINE: And where is it—will it be?

MATTHEWS: It's going to be in Minneapolis this year.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: And it's been in Wales and it's been all over here. Oh, dear. Yeah, all over.

LEVINE: And is it—how many people generally attend such an event?

MATTHEWS: Oh, at least fifteen hundred.

LEVINE: Oh, my.

MATTHEWS: I've seen it when it's been over the two thousand, years ago. But—

LEVINE: Wow. And then what about the organizations? The organization here and the one that you started in in Cleveland?

MATTHEWS: Well, the women's Welsh clubs are still going strong and the home is gorgeous in Lorraine, Ohio. And it used to be that you had to be Welsh or of Welsh descent to be able to get in there, but then social security came along and the government got involved. So now there are different reasons, but the Welsh women's clubs still manage it.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: And handle it, you know. And they have beautiful grounds. They've just added to the property another building and going great guns and it's all because of Women's Welsh Clubs of America. The money they make goes to support that home.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and how do they make their money?

MATTHEWS: Oh, they have dinners and things like this, you know, and projects that they sell things. Make things and sell them.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MATTHEWS: Done a lot of stuff over the years.

LEVINE: And these—and these women, Welsh Women's Clubs are all over the country?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, but the Cleveland group is the one that—

LEVINE: That does that.

MATTHEWS: Most of that, but they send their money in from the other clubs, too, because they have a convention once a year. Well --

LEVINE: Now, is it the Welsh Women's Clubs here that you're a part of?

MATTHEWS: No, it's called--

LEVINE: No, what is this one?

MATTHEWS: Ours is the Welsh—St. David's Organization.

LEVINE: And those are—

MATTHEWS: St. David's Welsh Society.

LEVINE: I see. Now, St. David's Welsh Societies are all over the country?

MATTHEWS: Oh, yeah, they're all over the country.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MATTHEWS: Uh-hmm. Yes.

LEVINE: Wow. Wow. So did—let's see. Well, how is this time in your life, now that you're older and your husband's gone and—

MATTHEWS: Well, it's all right. I'm doing all right.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MATTHEWS: I just lost like my sister and my sister-in-law in July, June the 28th to August the 2nd.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MATTHEWS: July 24th to August the 2nd, and—but it's—it's getting better.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Yeah. Yeah. Well—

MATTHEWS: I still want to call them in the morning, you know what I mean? I get up—because one was in Clearwater, one was in Largo.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Well, it must give you comfort that you have the—the Welsh Society here.

MATTHEWS: Oh, they—that's very true. That's very true. Very, very true.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, so as far as coming to this country, it's worked out—

MATTHEWS: Oh, wonderful.

LEVINE: For you.

MATTHEWS: No, no, it's been wonderful.

LEVINE: Great. Okay, is there anything else you can think of that maybe we didn't cover enough or anything you'd like to say before we go?

MATTHEWS: No, I thank you for this chance, but I don't—I don't have anything else to say.

LEVINE: Well, that's wonderful. Well, I think we've just about covered everything. I want to thank you so much.

MATTHEWS: Oh, you're more than welcome.

LEVINE: Lovely to meet you.

MATTHEWS: And nice to meet you, too.

LEVINE: And to hear your story.

MATTHEWS: Right. Okay.

LEVINE: Okay. I'm talking with Marian Matthews, who came from Wales at twelve years of age on the Aquitania in 1929 and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW

