

EI-1050

GRACE GALLOWAY DOCHERTY KIRSCHLER GAGE

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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SCOTLAND, 1922

AGE: 3

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RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: —Gage, who—who is the daughter of Christine—Christina—Christina Spratt, who I—I just interviewed, who is a hundred years of age. And Grace came when she was three from Scotland with her widowed mother and her younger brother.

GAGE: Sister.

LEVINE: Sister. Sister—[clears throat] in 1922. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Okay. If you would start for the tape and say your birth date and where in Scotland you were coming from.

GAGE: I was born in Glasgow, Scotland and came here with my widowed mother after my father had passed away. We were held in Ellis Island, and my mother says three or four days, but originally it was a two-week period, from what I understand, the reason being that I had just been released from a hospital in Glasgow with diphtheria. And we were being checked out on Es—Ellis Island before I could be released to my grandmother. And she had a house here in Kearny, New Jersey

and we went there to live with my grandmother and my grandfather, two of my mother's brothers, George and William, and a sister named Mazie [PH], who was just 14 years of age.

LEVINE: Okay. Maybe you can—you can fill in some of the gaps on your mother's interview. W—what happened to your father?

GAGE: My father was not a well person, even when my mother and father married. They didn't know what it was. It was supposedly ulcers. But after my mother married him and she saw how really sick he was, and he was in and out of the hospital many times, today, knowing what she knows, she is positively sure that he had cancer, and there was no cure and it was all through his system.

LEVINE: Hmm. Okay. So—this may be a superfluous question—but do you have any memories whatsoever of before you were in Kearny?

GAGE: No, I don't have any memories of Scotland at all. We visited there and, when my mother pointed out certain things, and then when she talks about them I kind of picture where they are because of the hospital, which was called the Royal Infirmary. And she lived across the street from that in the two-room flat. And today, that's a leveled piece of property, so I can picture only that. I don't really remember Scotland. But I do remember very well the first house we lived in in Kearny.

LEVINE: Okay. And is there anything else about Ellis Island that you've been told that you haven't already mentioned? Anything—I mean, your mother kept saying how everyone treated her—

GAGE: Yeah.

LEVINE: —her so beautifully.

GAGE: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you—did—was anything else ever mentioned about accommodations, about—

GAGE: Well—

LEVINE: —what people did for her or anything—

GAGE: Well, they were—like she says, they were good to her. The accommodations were, of course, very spare and very sparse. However, because everybody treated her so well and because she's a

kind of positive-thinking person, everything was perfect so far as she was concerned. And I really don't remember any of that at all.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

GAGE: I don't.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, then let's jump to Kearny. Before you tell about the house, could you say something about Kearny and the Scottish community that—

GAGE: Yeah.

LEVINE: —lived there?

GAGE: Yeah, there were two kinds of people that lived in Kearny, basically Scottish people and Polish people. And they were kind of separated where they lived. But since the churches were on the main street, Kearny Avenue, we got to know people because you walked everywhere and, you know, said hello and talked and whatnot. And you had some of the other children in school with you. And I lived in Kearny till I went through the ninth grade in high school. So I got—I liked Kearny as a town.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: And when I go back up now to New Jersey and visit, occasionally we go over there just to look everything over. And to me, it hasn't even changed that much. But of course, it's more heavily populated, like everything else.

LEVINE: Do you remember people knowing—people coming to the country after you came and after you were in Kearny from Scotland?

GAGE: I don't remember people coming after. But my mother—my grandmother made a friend when she came over. And they remained friends for years and years and years and probably went to the same church. I mean, church was a—in those days, was part of your social life. And in Kearny, there were three churches, the Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist/Episcopal Church. And—

LEVINE: Who went to that? Did Scottish people go to that?

GAGE: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Scottish people went to that because, oh, some of them were Episcopal because Episcopal Church was the Church of England. And there were some that went to that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: And did so in—in Scotland too.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. And how about the house, the—the house in Kearny that you lived in with your—what, your grandmother, grandfather—

GAGE: [chuckles] My grandmother, my grandfather—

LEVINE: Uncle—

GAGE: —two brothers, a younger sister, and then when we arrived, my mother with two children. But we managed and I don't remember it being real jammed up. I remember it always being busy. But it always seemed to be tidy to me. And I remember one time sitting on the back window of the bedroom in the back and falling out the window into a garbage can. [laughter] And I don't know how old I was but I do remember that. [chuckles] And then another time—I gu—I was kind of—my sister was very quiet, the sneaky type. And [laughs]—and I was the loud, boisterous one and always getting into trouble. And my grandfather, like my mother said, was a painter. And there was always paint around our house. And the boy upstairs and myself went down to the cellar and we painted each other green. [laughter]

LEVINE: That's Scotland. [laughs]

GAGE: And we got in a lot of trouble for doing that. [laughter]

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Let's see. So—so the house itself—

GAGE: It was a two-family house. And the—the owners of the house lived upstairs. They had the upstairs and then, li—like a couple rooms up in the attic. And then we had the first floor. And my mother says it only has one bedroom in it but I thought it had two bedrooms. I thought there were two bedrooms. But when I think about it now, sh—she's probably right. The kitchen, which was a big kitchen, and we all sat around the table. I mean, years ago, people enjoyed sitting around the table after dinner at night and chatting and just having a good time. And I guess we did a lot of that because there was no—there was no radio in those days. I remember the first radio we got but it wasn't in that house.

LEVINE: Hmm.

GAGE: We just did a lot of talking and singing and a Victrola. We always had a Victrola that you wound up [unclear]—

LEVINE: Do you remember any of the records? Were there—were there records that—I know there were records that immigrants—songs particularly for immigrant groups. Do you remember anything like that?

GAGE: No, that I don't remember. I don't remember anything about the kind of records we played. No.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. How about going to school? Wh—when you started school? Were there—were there other immigrant children in your school?

GAGE: Probably there were. But because we spoke English, it really didn't matter. Everybody, if they were immigrants in Kearny—unless the Polish people—but not the school I went to—we didn't have any Polish people in the school itself.

LEVINE: It—everybody was of Scottish extraction—

GAGE: Scottish extraction or born in America. I mean, I had two girlfriends in—in Kearny that I went through most of the school with. And one of them—well, one of them was the daughter of the police chief. And I'm sure he was American born and so was his family. And the other one was Flor McCollum [PH]. I saw McCollum in the paper today—Flor McCollum and her husband—or her father worked for the electric company. And they were well off in comparison to our family. In fact, they both had bicycles. And my mother couldn't afford to buy me a bicycle. But I was able to ride a bicycle because they lent me theirs. [laughter] I did have roller skates. And the town used to cut off—every Friday night, I think it was—they would cordon off a certain street for blocks and blocks and blocks. And all the kids went there on Friday night to roller skate. And you didn't have any interference.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GAGE: And when it would snow in the wintertime, the—the town was built—the main street was up high and it went down and then up again for the end of the li—the end of the city line. And we'd go s—sleigh riding down and up and have a good time when it snowed. And there were two other things in that town that I remember. There was a bad boy school. [chuckles]

MR. GAGE: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Parental home? Did they call it a parental home? I—

GAGE: I guess. We just called it the bad boy school. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MR. GAGE: It was the Boy's Town of Kearny.

GAGE: Yeah. And then there was a—a place where children could go to be cared for before and after school if their mother went to work and nobody else could take care of them. And that was like a daycare, and I remember that. And I remember every time I passed it, saying, "Oh, I'm glad I don't have to go here," because my grandma took care of us.

LEVINE: Well, why don't you talk about, as a little—as a little girl, what your grandma was like?

GAGE: My grandma was a—she was a gem but I hate to say this. She favored my sister.

MR. GAGE: [laughs]

GAGE: And I can understand that because Honey was only seven months old and, technically, she raised Honey. And—where I was a little bit older and a little bit fresher. And so it—it—I wasn't the favorite. But she was always good to me. And we never had anything—nobody abused us or did anything that you hear about children—happening to children today. My mother, if I did something wrong and we'd get in the bathtub together at night—we got washed together. And if I did something wrong, I got smacked on the bare behind. That was the punishment.

MR. GAGE: [laughs]

GAGE: And it was over with. That was it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. You mean, you and Honey took your baths—

GAGE: Together.

LEVINE: —at the same time? Uh-huh.

GAGE: Oh, yeah. My mother dumped us in together, of course.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GAGE: [laughs]

LEVINE: And—and do you remember any ways about your grandmother that she carried over to this country? Any Scottish—either—maybe it's cooking or—

GAGE: Well, all her cooking was what she did in Scotland. And there were—we didn't have an oven when we first came to the United States. I mean, we had a coal oven where everything was cooked very slow, and a gas stove. But she—in—in Scotland, they don't have oven—at least at that time they didn't have ov—ovens at all and so the bakery was very important for something that was baked or cake or something like that. When you wanted some dessert like that, you went to the bakery and bought it. You could also buy a steak and kidney pie with a flaky crust on it, and what they used to call meat pies. And they had something they wrapped in—like a pig in a blanket. They called that a bridey [PH]. I don't know where they got the name from. And in Kearny they had these Scottish bakeries. And we still went to the bakery to buy baked goods till much later on. We were out of Kearny before my grandma started to do any real baking. And then she started to bake up a storm.

LEVINE: Well, that was because you could get it there. You mean she didn't have to do it in Kearny. Is that—is that what you mean?

GAGE: Yeah, she couldn't do it in Kearny. We—

LEVINE: Because she—she didn't have—

GAGE: She was used to it. She was used to going to the bakery. And then when we moved to Newark when I was about 15, then she really started baking.

LEVINE: Mmm, uh-hmm. And how about your grandfather?

GAGE: My grandfather was always there and he was there at supertime at night. And my mother talks about his drinking. I don't remember when he drank every night. I remember when he went to work, came home. But on Saturday, Saturday was a big day. He would take my grandma downtown Newark. And, you know, they had to go on a bus from Kearny to Newark. And he would take her out to lunch and to a movie. And then they would go to the farmer's market and buy some supplies there and come home. And he dropped her off and he took off. And he took off for the whole night and rolled in. And he rolled in.

LEVINE: Hmm.

GAGE: I remember one time the minister come into the house. And he had fallen on the dining room floor. And the entrance to the house was in the dining room. And so we just pushed him under the table and [chuckles] pulled the tablecloth down so the minister couldn't see him. [laughter] Funny, the things you remember.

LEVINE: Right.

MR. GAGE: [unclear] fish.

GAGE: Oh, yeah. And he—he loved to fish, my—well, in Scotland, my grandfather worked on a—he pa—was a painter to trade but he worked on a big estate and went up to do things for them. And he could always get fish and stuff, and he would bring it home to my grandmother and whatnot and—and bring home fresh fowl of some kind. But he loved to fish. And when he went fishing from Kearny he'd go out in the wintertime with his bottle and fish all night. He went at night fishing, fish all night, come home with a bag of fish. And it would be in a burlap bag over his shoulder and he would be drunk as the Lord when he walked in that door. And all he did was empty the bag on the kitchen floor till my grandma got up to clean the fish. [laughter] And of course, we had a box out the window in the cold weather. And you talk about freezers today. We had a freezer all winter long. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GAGE: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you put the fish in there?

GAGE: Sure.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. That's great. [clears throat] Let's see. So—and how do you remember your mother as—when you were a little girl in Kearny?

GAGE: Oh, my mother was—she gave us every bit of time she could. She really did. When she wasn't working, she gave us all the time. Saturday, we'd get up in the morning and everybody'd help work and clean the whole house on Saturday. My grandmother didn't do that. My grandmother wasn't a particularly well woman. But we'd get up on Saturday and clean the house and then the afternoon, we went out.

And we'd go downtown and that was our day. I don't remember going to the movies but maybe we did. But we'd go shopping and whatnot. And we used to go into Schraft's [PH] Candy Shop on the way home. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Hmm.

GAGE: And buy something special to come home. But my mother gave—always gave us a lot of time. And then on Sunday—Sunday, you didn't do anything. We would get dressed in the morning in our fancy Sunday clothes and we would stay that way all day. And if you went out on the outside of your house, you just sat on the porch and talked with somebody else, you know. But we weren't allowed t—to do—Sunday was really what you call a day of rest.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

GAGE: And I don't know—I don't remember my mother when I was little doing anything very much on Sunday but maybe she did. But we went to church in the morning and Sunday school. And it took up half the day. And when we'd get home we'd have dinner in the weeknights at five o'clock or six o'clock. But on Sunday, we had dinner when we came home from church. And then in the afternoon, whatever friends we had, and they were all immigrant friends from Scotland, they would—some of them would stop in in the afternoon and spend the afternoon, because a lot of them lived out, which meant they lived with a rich family and were servants in a richer house. And they'd have Sunday afternoon off. And then they'd come to our house. And my grandma could whip up a big, big batch of biscuits and throw 'em on the table Sunday night, or a big pot of Welch rarebit, she used to make. And something that was easy for her but it was always a lot of fun on Sunday afternoon.

LEVINE: Hmm.

GAGE: Because people came.

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother working so hard on—

GAGE: Yeah.

LEVINE: —on the—on the sewing after—

GAGE: Yeah.

LEVINE: —she left the mill?

GAGE: After she—no, she—you mean at night?

LEVINE: In [unclear]—yeah.

GAGE: At night. Yeah, because I used to sit at the back of the machine and cut the threads for her, because she made an apron that the ladies wore. And then they—a housedress, like. And then she made an apron that went over that that matched and it had big pockets in the front. And so she was like a—a—like, in a factory [chuckles] pushing the thing—stuff. And we used to clip the threads coming off the machine.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: Oh, yeah. That was working together. And then in a later date, Coats and Clarks used to display in the stores, especially in the five and tens, samples of crochet work, tablecloths and bedspreads and covers for—animacasters [PH], they called them, covers for chairs and couches. And she used to launder the displays. And we would push the dining room table all the way over to the edge. And if it was a tablecloth, a great big sheet would go on the floor and then the tablecloth on top. And four of us would be on our hands and knees ironing these samples.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GAGE: Yeah.

MR. GAGE: Putting them on a needle rack.

GAGE: And then we used to put stuff on what they called Kerner—

MR. GAGE: The stretchers.

GAGE: Curtain stretchers. And you used to put them on the—oh, your fingers got all—

LEVINE: Oh, right. I remember those.

GAGE: Yeah, my mother worked hard but I always said she worked hard but I think one of the reasons why—that's she's as good as she is today is she retired at 60. And how many people that work that hard retire at 60?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: And she came to Florida then and life was easy. She married a man who had two sons and they were married, and my mother had two daughters and we were married. And so they didn't have a care in the world.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, isn't that nice? She got a chance to relax—

GAGE: Yeah, right.

LEVINE: —after all that.

GAGE: Right. And she worked hard in her little house but it was because she wanted to. It wasn't to earn a living.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GAGE: Ah—

LEVINE: Yeah.

GAGE: But—

LEVINE: Well, do y—were you aware of any Scottish organizations or clubs that—

GAGE: There was a Scottish American club in Kearny. And the only time— and there was the Masonic lodges. And my mother's younger sister— there was always a boyfriend of hers hanging around. She never got married till she was something like 38 but she had several boyfriends. In fact, I remember one in Kearny, and we always thought she was going to marry him but she didn't. She said she wouldn't get married till she could have everything she never had and she wouldn't have to work. And that's exactly what she did.

LEVINE: This is Mazie?

GAGE: Yeah. Yeah. And that's really what she did. She waited till she fell in love with somebody who could give her everything.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, with these organizations, did they have any, like, events that—that—

GAGE: Yeah, they did have but we didn't go to them very often. Maybe at Christmastime we went to a big party or something like that.

LEVINE: Hmm.

GAGE: But we were not—maybe that's where my mother went to the dances that she talked about. [chuckles] You know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GAGE: But we weren't involved with it.

LEVINE: Okay. And how about food? Did your mother or grandmother cook any things in particular that were of Scottish origin?

GAGE: Well, everything in Scotland is what you call stewed, I mean, because everything had to go on the top of the stove. And, mainly, that's what we had, things that could be cooked on top of the stove. I don't—I really don't remember, except chicken—I don't remember ever—and that would be once in a while—I don't remember having any, like a roast beef or a roast pork or any—I don't remember that, if we did. Not in those early years in Kearny.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: And it seemed like—well, a lot of people in those days—there weren't vegetables available in the winter like there are now.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GAGE: There was cabbage and turnips and carrots and onions. Isn't that right? I mean, there wasn't anything else in those days because there was no way to keep it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: So that's what we had. And then, of course, when my—my grandma learned to bake, the one thing she was terrific at was pastry, apple pies and—and what we used to call raisin—raisin squares. It was a great big pan full of them, raisin filling.

MR. GAGE: Current squares, they were called originally.

GAGE: Huh? Current squares.

MR. GAGE: Current squares.

GAGE: Well, they were made with currents originally.

MR. GAGE: Originally.

GAGE: And then current—

MR. GAGE: Then they switched to car—[unclear].

GAGE: Currents went out of the—

MR. GAGE: And switched over to raisins.

GAGE: But Grandma made a lot of soups, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: Beef and vegetable soups and Scottish shortbread.

MR. GAGE: Shortbread.

GAGE: We make that today.

MR. GAGE: I make that today.

LEVINE: Really?

GAGE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

GAGE: And Grandma made that.

LEVINE: [clears throat] Let's see. So what did you do? You—then you moved to Newark when you were about 15? Is that right?

GAGE: Yeah, we moved to Newark. Well, my grandfather died. He died when I was 12. And my aun—my—Mazie, my mother's sister, Mazie—I never called her Aunt Mazie because she was only 10 years older than me, and she wanted to go to school in Newark, night school, because—and so we moved to Newark so Mazie could go to night school. That was the reason.

LEVINE: Really?

GAGE: And it proved good for me too [chuckles] eventually. And the last year I went about two months, finishing my ninth grade in Kearny High School. I walked from Newark to Kearny everyday to school, used to go across a railroad bridge.

MR. GAGE: Railroad track, yeah.

GAGE: Yeah, used to go across a railroad bridge.

LEVINE: You walked from Newark to Kearny?

GAGE: Yeah.

MR. GAGE: It's only across the Passaic River.

GAGE: Across the Passaic River everyday, yeah. Well, it was only for, maybe, six weeks. The end of—everybody moved at the end of the school year in those days.

LEVINE: Hmm.

GAGE: Yeah. And so then we had—then we went into a—well, the apartment we had—we had before that had—two bedrooms? No, three bedrooms. After we moved away from the first house, we went to live in another house in Kearny on the third floor of a six-family house, three on each side.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: And we had only two bedrooms in that house. And I—and my—like my mother said, my grandfather loved to paint and he always painted, and we wanted to help. Paint in those day isn't like paint today. And I cried and hollered and carried on, "I want to paint. I want to paint." And we had a big pantry. So he gave me the paint and the brush and he closed the door. And I came out of there pretty quick.

MR. GAGE: [chuckles]

LEVINE: Was he a painter—did he paint for a living here?

GAGE: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: And he did some very intricate work. He used to paint ceilings in theaters—

LEVINE: Hmm.

GAGE: —where they had scrolls and stuff like that.

LEVINE: Hmm.

GAGE: Oh, our house was always—our walls were always beautiful.

LEVINE: Hmm, uh-hmm.

GAGE: Did a lot of stippling type work.

LEVINE: Huh. Did—how about your grandmother and grandfather? Do you think they were happy they came to this country?

GAGE: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I think so. I think so. How—how happy my grandmother—well, I don't know. My grandma was awful happy after [chuckles] my grandfather died. She felt free.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

GAGE: Unfortunately.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: And that happens to people today. You read it all the time.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: And I was 12 when my grandfather died. And then my grandmother never did anything except take care of the house. And then when they—when we moved to Newark we had three bedrooms. My sister and I had a bedroom. My grandma had a bedroom and my mother and her sister had a bedroom. By that time, the boys were out and married.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: And so it was a big house.

LEVINE: Now—

GAGE: It seemed like a big house.

LEVINE: Were the boys of a working age when they came?

GAGE: Well, yeah, because George, the one that's closest to my mother, if my mother was 23, George was 25. And he was a carpenter by trade.

LEVINE: Was he a carpenter in Scotland?

GAGE: Yeah, he learned his trade in Scotland.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. And then—

GAGE: [unclear] and then—

LEVINE: —he did that here.

GAGE: Right. And he was a ship's carpenter.

LEVINE: Hmm. And how about—was it Billy? Who was the other one?

GAGE: Billy—Billy, I don't know really what he ever really did because he was heavy on the drinking too. And he was the one that was the prisoner of war.

LEVINE: Oh, right.

GAGE: And he was the first one to come here but he was—it seemed—all that I remember him wa—doing for a living was waitress—waiter work.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Could you maybe fill in the prisoner of war story about—about your uncle? I mean, what—this was World War I. And where was he taken?

GAGE: World War I. And he met this American when he was a prisoner of war. And the American was a wealthy man. But he was in—I don't know that he was in prison. But my uncle waited on him, took care of him.

LEVINE: Where was he? In what—

GAGE: In Germany.

LEVINE: In Germany, uh-hmm.

GAGE: Prisoner in Germany. And my uncle was taken a prisoner almost as soon as he landed. And—and this man said to him, "When the war is over and we're released, I want you to come to America. I will sponsor you to come to America. And that's what he did.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: And that was what—well, I don't know what would have happened if that hadn't happened.

LEVINE: Wow.

GAGE: And like—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

GAGE: —my mother talks about going to live with her mother-in-law when— and she knew she was coming to America. And my mother-in-law wanted my mother to separate the children to let me stay in Scotland and bring my sister here. And that was a very common practice. When there were two or three children in a family, the oldest child would get left behind to stay with a grandparent.

LEVINE: Really?

GAGE: And very often, the sisters or the brothers never really got to know one another. It was kind of sad because I had—I worked with a girl who was separated from her sister in that way. And she never got to know her sister.

LEVINE: Hmm.

GAGE: Yeah, very sad.

LEVINE: Was it—was it with girls or was any—it was any—boys and girls.

GAGE: It was boys and girls.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: But it was in—an—because the grandparents wanted somebody, I guess, to look after them when they got a little bit older.

LEVINE: Oh.

GAGE: You hear why—in fact, there was a piece in the paper recently about why some families have so many children. Because they want to be sure that they'll be taken care of when they're old. Not American families. Immigrant families.

- LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Do you think—looking back on it, do you think that, having immigrated here, made a difference to you, I mean, as a person?
- GAGE: Being an immigrant?
- LEVINE: Yeah.
- GAGE: I never felt like an immigrant.
- LEVINE: You never felt—
- GAGE: No.
- LEVINE: Because you were so young, you didn't—
- GAGE: I went right away, had a—of course, I was educated in the United States from the very beginning. And—
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm.
- GAGE: —as soon as I was 21, I was sitting across the—the desk from somebody saying, "I do. I will. And answering all the questions to become a citizen.
- LEVINE: Mmm, uh-huh. Do you remember when your mother became a citizen?
- GAGE: Well, I think, technically, she was first a citizen under her father. They allowed that in those days. You were technically a citizen. But in order to get papers, you know, so that you have a naturalization paper, you had to go through a certain process. But that couldn't happen to me because my mother was an immigrant too.
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm.
- GAGE: But I never think about it, only when I'm doing a lot of reading and something like that. And I'll say, "Well, I was too."
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm.
- GAGE: And some of these children now that come over when they're very little, they won't realize that they're immigrants.
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

GAGE: And anyway, we are a nation of immigrants.

LEVINE: Absolutely.

GAGE: Even the people who brag about being here for hundreds of years.

LEVINE: You go back far enough—

GAGE: Right. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Right. [chuckles]

GAGE: Go back far enough. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Right. [chuckles]

MR. GAGE: Like me.

GAGE: Yeah. [chuckles]

LEVINE: You go back far?

GAGE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, okay. So you were 21 when—well, you finished high school. D—you finished high school in—

GAGE: I went—how did that happen? My mother was very anxious for me to hurry up and go to work because, by that time, just my grandfather wasn't earning any—my grandfather wasn't there. He was dead. And my—my mother and my—her sister were supporting the house. So they were very anxious for me to go to work. And so I went for an interview in—my mother worked for Clarks and Coats Thread and I worked for—or I went for an interview to Spool Cotton Company, which is the distributor of the Coats and Clarks products. And when I went for the interview, the gentleman who interviewed me said, "You may have this job"—it was in the height of the Depression. "You may have this job only if you promise to finish high school." I had two years in high school but I didn't have the next two years. So I promised and then I went to night school because I was living in Newark. So I went to night school for the next two years.

LEVINE: Hmm.

GAGE: And I went to work everyday, ran home, got my dinner, walked to high school and went to school from 7 to 10 at night for two years.

LEVINE: Hmm.

GAGE: So when kids talk about they work hard, you know, we all worked hard in those days.

LEVINE: Hmm, yeah.

GAGE: And—and I didn't—didn't have my pay to keep. I handed my pay to my mother and I got \$5 back. [chuckles]

LEVINE: And how did the Depression affect you and your family?

GAGE: Well, we—we were really—we were really fortunate because somebody was always working. There was always somebody in the house working. At one time, it was only my mother but there was somebody working. So we never had to get help from anybody.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: We just tightened our belts. I guess that's what you would say.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: And be—

LEVINE: So—

GAGE: And because my mother did sewing at home, it was—so she was really the breadwinner for a little while.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. And then did you stay working for—what was it, Spool Cotton?

GAGE: Did I stay where—I stayed with them. Well, where I worked originally, I could walk to work, which saved me a nickel. [chuckles] When you think about it, you have to laugh. And then they transferred the office I was in to New York. And the commute killed me. And even though I made it as short as possible, because I went on the Pensi [PH] Railroad. I had to take a bus down to get the train, hop on the train, go to New York, walk from this train station up—I worked in the Empire State Building, worked there. After I put in about a year of that I said to me, "This is not for me." So I went to the boss one day and I said, "I just don't like this, hacking this—this travel." So he said, "When do you want to leave?" I said, "Anytime." He said, "Do you want to go today?" I said, "Yeah." [chuckles] I left that night, just like that.

LEVINE: And what'd you do then?

GAGE: Where did I work after that? Oh, I went to work for Internal Revenue. I went and took an exam and went to work for Internal Revenue.

LEVINE: Hmm.

GAGE: And after I went from Internal Revenue I said to myself, "I'm going to work—regardless of where, I'm going to work for civil service." And all—any job I had was under civil service.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GAGE: The last job I had was right here in the city in the library.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm. So then did—did you marry somewhere along in this job—

GAGE: Oh, yeah. I married—when I was 19? How old was Jessie?

MR. GAGE: When?

GAGE: First—when she g—when you and her got married?

MR. GAGE: I was 21; she was 19.

GAGE: She was 19. Well, I was 19 too because I got—she was a year older than me and I got married a year later than her.

MR. GAGE: Yeah, right.

GAGE: And I married a—a ne'er-do-well. I didn't put his name in here because—

LEVINE: Oh, [chuckles] you don't want his name—

GAGE: —it wasn't necessary.

LEVINE: Okay.

GAGE: And I was married to him five years and I found out—oh, I found out—I was pregnant and he started to run around with another girl. And I said, "The hell with you."

LEVINE: Hmm.

GAGE: And, well, the war—the war came along. The Second World War came along.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: And they conscripted him.

LEVINE: Hmm.

GAGE: I got blamed for that but I didn't turn him in. And—

LEVINE: So then—

GAGE: He was overseas a couple of years, I think. Yeah. And then I divorced him and then I was divorced a quite a long time. [telephone rings]

LEVINE: Wait, we'll pause here. [tape off/on] Resuming here after a phone call. So then did you have a child at that point?

GAGE: Oh, yeah. I had—yeah, I had a son.

LEVINE: And—and his name?

GAGE: Was Arthur.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: And he was named after his father. And he isn't living today. He was killed in an automobile accident—

LEVINE: Hmm.

GAGE: —several years ago.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: So—

LEVINE: So then you went back to work after you divorced? Or you were working the whole time or—

MR. GAGE: You worked when Jessie and I were taking care of [unclear]. You were working for Internal Revenue.

GAGE: Yeah, I was working for Internal Revenue. Yeah, uh-hmm. I don't know how many years I was do—well, '39, '45, '46, '47. I guess I was divorced in '47.

MR. GAGE: [unclear]

GAGE: '46, '47. And then I remarried in 1952 and I was married 25 years. We moved down here when—I guess we were just married about two years when we moved to Florida.

LEVINE: This is Kirschler?

GAGE: John Kirschler.

MR. GAGE: John—

LEVINE: John Kirschler.

GAGE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: And we moved to Florida because he was happy in the warm weather. And, yeah, we were married 25 years and he had a tumor on the brain.

LEVINE: Hmm.

GAGE: And he lived just 10 weeks after they tried to remove it.

LEVINE: Hmm. Hmm.

GAGE: That's 20 years ago.

LEVINE: Now, did you have any other children?

GAGE: Yeah, I have one daughter, Christina Kirschler. She's named after my mother.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GAGE: And she's 42—42, 43.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GAGE: And she's single.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-hmm. Okay. So it—it sounds as though you always kind of thought of yourself as American more than—

GAGE: Oh, I did. I never—I never thought of—my mother will remind me every once in a while, and I'm not ashamed that I'm Scottish. In fact, I may be proud of it, but—and of course, we had an opportunity—well, I went once with Jack Traxler's [PH] father. And we went to three countries, England and Scotland and whatnot. And then we went back twice again, just to Scotland, spent the whole three weeks in Scotland. And my mother went with us.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: So that kind of like—you know, I—I—I—I'm happy that I know what the country is like and—and all like that. And, except for the terrible weather they have, I probably could live there. It's just damp all the time.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. [beeping sound] Is that you?

GAGE: She may be getting up.

MR. GAGE: Is she coming down the hall? No. No, she's—

GAGE: No, you'd hear her singing.

LEVINE: Oh.

MR. GAGE: She's singing.

LEVINE: Yeah. Let's see. Well, now, did—when you think about, like the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island and all that, do you feel like you have a particular connection?

GAGE: To Ellis Island?

LEVINE: Hmm.

GAGE: Not particularly. I'm interested in it, yeah, and interested in the fact that it is being taken care of, because it was a particular time in American history.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: When people had to go through there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: I mean, prior to that it didn't exist and now it doesn't exist at all.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: And for that reason, yeah, I kind of say to myself, 'Oh, yeah. I was there once.'

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

GAGE: You know, oh, yeah. And I liked the idea and I'd like to go see it. And I'll have an opportunity, probably. I mean, I've been going back to New Jersey since I retired, anyway, because I couldn't do it before then—every spring and every fall, because my sister lived up there. And then my sister moved down here. But I still went up every spring and fall because I could stay with my friends.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how is this time of your life, now that you're retired in Florida?

GAGE: Oh, h—well, Florida is my home. I love Florida.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: I've always, ever since I came here. I mean, I don't—like I say, my nature is that I could live and put up with almost anything if I had to. That's—my mother's like that too. But I I—I like Florida. I—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: I wouldn't—I'd have to have a real reason to go someplace else.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: And Florida—the—and I say to myself—and it's changed so since I came to live here, very vastly, vastly changed. I mean, we have dirt today. We never had dirt years ago. You opened your windows and it was nice and fresh and clean. And—but now there's so much traffic and so many—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: —people and so many cars. And they have the big high rises. We didn't have big high rises over there. We could go and the whole

beach was clear. It's not like that today. So I'm glad I'm the age I am when I wouldn't be using all those facilities.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

GAGE: Although I did go over to the beach up till the last time I almost got carried away with the tide. So I said to myself, 'No more. I'm too old for this.' [laughter]

LEVINE: Okay. Well, now—

GAGE: But—

LEVINE: I'm sorry. Go ahead.

GAGE: But you used to be able to take your dog and go over to the beach and run like mad, you know, and you can't do that anymore.

LEVINE: Mmm. Well, is there anything else you can think of? Anything maybe that you want to add to your mother's interview? Anything that maybe—

GAGE: Yeah, she—

LEVINE: —she didn't—

GAGE: She did a pretty good job, all things considering.

LEVINE: Oh, a wonderful job.

GAGE: Considering that we've had—we—we're thrilled with how she came out today.

MR. GAGE: Yeah.

GAGE: Right. Really thrilled.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GAGE: And I—I'm—I'm not worried about my tape but I would really love to have a copy of hers.

LEVINE: Well, your—

GAGE: I don't care how long it takes.

LEVINE: Absolutely. Okay.

GAGE: Yeah.

MR. GAGE: I'll say one thing about her mother. Although today, she repeats, which is part of the problem with old age, she was really a hard working individual. She didn't know the word rest. She would do anything for anybody. She was the most giving individual you'd ever want to meet in your life.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MR. GAGE: She would do anything for anybody.

GAGE: Yeah. I mean, even after she—even—I don't know how many years ago but she used to run to a friend. She used to run three times to the nursing home to see her a week, three times, bring home her laundry—

MR. GAGE: And laundry.

GAGE: —and do it.

MR. GAGE: Bring home the laundry and take it back.

GAGE: And just—she—just that kind of person. In fact, she still wants to. She comes in the kitchen [chuckles] and she'll—

MR. GAGE: Yes, she wants to do the dishes.

GAGE: —say, “Is there anything I can do to help you?” [laughs]

MR. GAGE: She wants to do the dishes, you know, and I say, “No, they're all done.” [laughter]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GAGE: Yeah.

LEVINE: That's wonderful.

GAGE: And I think that's what kept her as well as she is because she—she didn't sit around complaining.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Okay. Well, I want to thank you very much for—I—

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GAGE: Well, it's been delightful.

LEVINE: Two unexpectedly [chuckles] wonderful interviews.

GAGE: We—it's been delightful for us too. We're real pleased.

LEVINE: Oh, good. Well, good. Okay. I want to say that I'm speaking with Grace Gage now and her husband, Chan Gage, is here and has added his two cents [chuckles] about—about Christina Spratt, who I interviewed earlier. And Grace came from Scotland with her mother and younger sister in 1922 when she was three years old. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]