

EI-1379

FRANCES HOLVERSEN

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LEVINE: --3rd, 2005, and I'm here in Westchester, Pennsylvania, with Mrs. Frances Holversen, who came here from Liverpool, England, when she was four and a half months of age. And she arrived in September of 1920. She came on the H.M.S. Mobile. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. If we could start at the beginning, if you would say your birth date, please?

HOLVERSEN: I was born on May 4th, 1920.

LEVINE: Okay, and you were born in Liverpool?

HOLVERSEN: That's correct.

LEVINE: Do you by any chance remember—you probably don't remember the address?

HOLVERSEN: I know it was 6 Spofeth Road, because that's where my folks lived at the time, in Liverpool.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, oh. Say the road again?

HOLVERSEN: Spofeth, S-P-O-F-E-T-H.

LEVINE: Great! Okay, now what was your mother's name?

HOLVERSEN: My mother's name was Frances, maiden name Barlow.

LEVINE: And your father's name?

HOLVERSEN: Arthur, Arthur Stevenson Perry.

LEVINE: And so your maiden name was Perry?

HOLVERSEN: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, okay. And so when you arrived here, your name was Frances-
-?

HOLVERSEN: Perry.

LEVINE: Perry. And did you have grandparents back in Liverpool?

HOLVERSEN: Yes, I had a grandfather and a grandmother still living over there at the time.

LEVINE: And what about your mother and father? Were their families from the Liverpool area?

HOLVERSEN: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Going back generations?

HOLVERSEN: Yes, my mother's family originated in Scotland, Kilmarnock, Scotland. But my Dad, I think most of them were from England, Liverpool.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So did your mother consider herself Scottish, would you say, or no?

HOLVERSEN: Well, she had her little burr, and she often referred to her as Scottish. She'd sing me to sleep at night with Scottish lullabies, because she was a great favorite of Harry Lauder. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Oh, okay. All right, so you came here. Now, did anybody ever tell you why your mother and father came here when they did?

HOLVERSEN: Yes, my father's sister, two sisters had come here, and they said the opportunities here were much better than over in England. England was just, Liverpool was just building up after World War One, and it was quite devastated. So they—and my Dad had come over in June, and then my mother and I came over in September.

LEVINE: So your Dad came first?

HOLVERSEN: Yes.

LEVINE: Were you the only child?

HOLVERSEN: Yes, I was.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, okay. So when your father came here, what did he do, before he sent for you?

HOLVERSEN: Well, he used to be a jockey in England. He was a Jockey in Aintree, before he was married.

LEVINE: Wow.

HOLVERSEN: But then when he came over here, he worked in the shipyards. And he was a boxer in England, by the way. He was a flyweight champion in Liverpool, and his brother Albert was a bantamweight champion in England. They were both boxers. And then when they came over here, my Dad was—he used to go to all the polo games. He was very active in that. And then he worked as a machinist in the shipyards.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Which shipyard, do you know?

HOLVERSEN: Morse, M-O-R-S-E.

LEVINE: Was that in Brooklyn?

HOLVERSEN: Yes, that was in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, okay. So he settled in Brooklyn, is that where he was living?

HOLVERSEN: That's where we went, to Bay Ridge.

LEVINE: Bay Ridge.

HOLVERSEN: A wonderful place! I lived there for seventeen years.

LEVINE: Oh, wow! Okay, so anything about leaving, or the voyage, that your mother or father mentioned to you?

HOLVERSEN: Well, my mother just mentioned it was a great sight for her to see the Statue of Liberty when they disembarked in Liberty Island. And she said everybody was transferred to Ellis Island, given a hot cup of coffee, and the women had coal poured on their hair, as a precaution against carrying any lice. Of course, my mother had long hair, and she was fine, but she used to feel sorry for some of the ladies, that they just didn't ask questions, they just cut their hair right off, at the time! And my parents were headed for Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, to be with the sister, my Dad's sister.

LEVINE: Sister, okay.

HOLVERSEN: And that's where we lived as I was growing up, all my teenage—in my youth years.

LEVINE: You lived in Bay Ridge?

HOLVERSEN: Bay Ridge.

LEVINE: And now, did you live with your father's sister?

HOLVERSEN: No, no. They had their own apartment.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay, so your earliest memories, up 'til seventeen, are from Bay Ridge, Brooklyn?

HOLVERSEN: Yeah, yes.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay, so what was Bay Ridge, the immediate community, like, when you were growing up?

HOLVERSEN: I think it was very, very nice, and I understand it still is. In fact, somebody just recently showed me a book, which I purchased. And it has a picture of the church I was married in, the schools I went to. And I do have it somewhere.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: So I'm still very interested in Bay Ridge.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HOLVERSEN: I guess they say you can't take New York out of the girl.

LEVINE: Yeah, right. Well, tell me, was it a largely immigrant neighborhood when you were growing up?

HOLVERSEN: Well, I never realized, because you don't ask; you're just friends. Some were Italian. There was primarily, Bay Ridge was primarily Irish or Scottish. Not Irish, Scottish—Norwegian, Scandinavian, because they had a lot of Scandinavian [unclear], and they used to have parades once a year, on the seventeenth of May, for Norwegian Independence Day. And of course, I married a Norwegian!

LEVINE: Oh! Uh-huh, okay, so it was largely Scandinavian. Scandinavian and Scottish, or no?

HOLVERSEN: Who?

LEVINE: Were the Scottish people living there, too?

HOLVERSEN: Well, there were, like, British and Scandinavian. I've seen that there.

LEVINE: That combination. Now it's different, yeah. Okay, so—

HOLVERSEN: At that time it was very nice.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. So your father worked in the shipyard. Did your mother work at all?

HOLVERSEN: My mother was a practical nurse.

LEVINE: Oh.

HOLVERSEN: She did nursing, and I used to go with her quite a lot, and sit and read books.

LEVINE: Did she become a nurse in this country, or she was a nurse when she came?

HOLVERSEN: She became a nurse here.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Did you ever have brothers and sisters? No.

HOLVERSEN: No.

LEVINE: Okay, so what did you do? You went to school, and then what did you do after you graduated from school?

HOLVERSEN: I graduated, finally, from Bay Ridge High School. No, I didn't graduate from Bay Ridge High School, but during the high school I was in the Glee Club, and I played a violin in the orchestra. And my folks moved to this same fellow that declared us into the country. They had moved to Zelienople, Pennsylvania, out near Pittsburgh. And my aunt was very sick [telephone rings]. My aunt was very sick, so they asked my mother to come out and take care of her. And that's where we moved, and I had my last year of high school out in Zelienople, and that's where I graduated. And it was a wonderful place, because even New York, the schools were excellent! And I felt so upset, because I was taking Regent's, and I was going to get a Regent's Diploma, which was unheard of in Pennsylvania. I was going to get a nice blue velvet diploma; there I got a paper one, so I was kind of upset at that. But it was the best year of my life, because there was only seventy-seven in the class, against about three hundred and fifty here in New York. And I just enjoyed everything.

LEVINE: Can you spell the name of the town?

HOLVERSEN: Z-E-L-I-E-N-O-P-L-E. And that was another thing—they put me on the cheerleading squad, and they laughed and teased me because I couldn't spell Zelienople fast enough!

LEVINE: [Laughs] So what was it about Zelienople that was so different and so nice for you, that last year?

HOLVERSEN: Well, it was a small group; everybody was friendly. And I liked the way they did their proms and things like, the junior class cooked, and all the parents took care of the seniors. And it was very nice. Of course, Snow White and the Dwarfs was a very famous movie at the time, and that was our theme for graduation. And of course, they made me as Dopey.

LEVINE: [Laughs]

HOLVERSEN: One of the dwarfs.

LEVINE: Well, it sounds like you fit right in?

HOLVERSEN: And I have gone to most of their reunions. I went to their reunion right up to sixty.

LEVINE: Wow, uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: I wasn't able to make that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, then did you, after you graduated, then what did you do?

HOLVERSEN: I went to work in the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company.

LEVINE: Back in New York?

HOLVERSEN: One Madison Avenue, in New York.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and did you stay there long?

HOLVERSEN: I was there I guess about nine years. I was there 'til my mother passed away. And then I went to take care of her, but she died right then and there. And there again, I had a lot of friends, and I became very good friends with Ruth Lowe, who I tried to track down. She wrote "I'll Never Smile Again."

LEVINE: Oh!

HOLVERSEN: We used to have coffee and breakfast every morning together. That was an interesting place to work, also.

LEVINE: Yeah, how come? What was interesting about it?

HOLVERSEN: Well, I guess I just liked the work. I had three—I ran a kintometer.

LEVINE: What's that?

HOLVERSEN: It's a machine—an adding machine. They don't use them anymore.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: And that's what I did, and I had three districts in New York that I had to take care of, and balance and all, with the policies and things. So I enjoyed that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: And then I got married in '45.

LEVINE: How did you meet your husband?

HOLVERSEN: I lived at the Y. I had a very unusual, strict father. And he was—I never was able to go anywhere, or do anything, socially. So I left home when

I was seventeen—or eighteen, I guess. No, wait a minute, after I graduated from high school. We had moved back to New York.

LEVINE: Right.

HOLVERSEN: Because my father didn't like it out there. That's why I had such freedom out there, because he didn't like it, and he didn't stay. He came back here.

LEVINE: Oh! Oh, that's why you liked it so much?

HOLVERSEN: Yes, that's right. I was able to socialize and do things. And then—

LEVINE: So how did you meet your husband?

HOLVERSEN: At a Y—at a dance. We used to have dances at the Y.W., where I lived. And he came out there. And I met him at a dance.

LEVINE: In Pennsylvania?

HOLVERSEN: In the Y.W.C.A. in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Oh, in Brooklyn.

HOLVERSEN: In Brooklyn, down by Atlantic or Pacific? There'd be one down there. And he lived, my husband lived in Flushing, [unclear].

LEVINE: So then you started seeing him? And then did you get married soon after?

HOLVERSEN: Four years later. The war was on.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. So what about the war? How did that affect you?

HOLVERSEN: Well, it didn't. I went to work every time. And of course, we had our blackouts, and other things. But we had to work a little overtime, because the Metropolitan has very short hours. We used to finish work at four o'clock, and we used to work late because of the war. We had to take—they didn't replace anybody's jobs; they just had the people who were working there work overtime to compensate for the people who went in the service. That's the way they worked it.

LEVINE: I see; I see. Do you remember when the war got over?

HOLVERSEN: Yes. I belonged to a choir in the Central Place Methodist Church. It's one of the biggest Methodist churches in Brooklyn. And every once in a

while, the choir would go as a group to have lunch at this little tea room. And one of the fellows who was not with us, because his wife had just come home from the hospital with a new baby—he came running in, and he said, “Guess what?” Oh, that was when Pearl Harbor started. I’m sorry. I’m going back.

LEVINE: All right, go ahead—tell that.

HOLVERSEN: So he came in and told us that America is at war, that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. And of course, then I worked in the U.S.O. as, you know, playing cards and serving the men who came in from service.

LEVINE: Was that fun?

HOLVERSEN: It was fun. It was fun, and sometimes I’d get upset, because some of them had had bad happenings, their wives had left them, or you know, their children they don’t see. Sad stories would happen when they were in the war.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: So, but I’m sorry, I missed that and went back. And you know, when I—you see, I had been married, and we living in Flushing, Long Island, out by Flushing Meadows, on Forty-First Street. And that’s where I lived when the war ended. And my husband was stationed at King’s Point Merchant Marine Academy. And we used to go out there all the time. He was in their pay and supply, in the maritime service. And we spent a lot of time out there, and I belonged to the women’s group. And Eleanor Roosevelt came out and opened up our new Petty Officer’s Club for us, turned the lock in the door; that was an exciting time to me!

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: And I used to go out there every night and play the piano. And Snookie Lansing, one of the fellows who used to sing in the Hit Parade, he used to come out there, and he sang at the piano when I played. It was interesting.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. When did you start taking piano lessons?

HOLVERSEN: Well, I took from the time I was six until I was nine. Then my folks couldn’t afford it. I think it went up to seventy-five cents a lesson [laughs] at that time! So, I just kept it up on my own, and I still play. I play every night in Bellingham.

LEVINE: Oh, wonderful, wonderful! So you were always musical?

HOLVERSEN: Yes, I ever would like music. Of course, when I left high school, I sort of closed my violin case, and I never played again.

LEVINE: Oh!

HOLVERSEN: But when I hear some of these virtuosos that come into Bellingham through Penny, I'm very often sorry that I did give it up.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Okay, so your mother and father—how would you describe—you say your father was strict. What was his personality like, in general?

HOLVERSEN: Well, friends of mine used to say he was a worldly saint and a house devil, because outside, his personality--he sang, he acted, he mixed with people very good. But in the house, he had the iron thumb. And nobody could tell him, "Let you daughter do this, do that."

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, and what about your mother? How would you describe her?

HOLVERSEN: My mother was very easy going, very quiet, and very—her personality was entirely different. But I guess that's why she got along with my Dad, because she didn't bother him.

LEVINE: Did he ever do any boxing in this country?

HOLVERSEN: No, never, no.

LEVINE: So, do you think they realized their American dream? I mean, the fact that they came here—do you think that it worked out for them?

HOLVERSEN: Oh, yes! My mother often used to say how wonderful it was to get over here. But my Dad, of course, he'd say, "Now in England, they didn't do this. In England they wouldn't kill somebody." Oh! And you couldn't talk to a policeman in England like you could here, he used to say.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. So he was favorable about it?

HOLVERSEN: He was very favorable about England, I think.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Yeah. Did he ever go back?

HOLVERSEN: When I was growing up, I remember when Herbert Hoover was running for President.

LEVINE: Oh, really?

HOLVERSEN: My Dad was not a political man. And this, I thought was interesting—I put it in here, too. He did not like politics, and get involved at all. But this one year when Hoover was running, my Dad, as a lot of people were years ago—Catholics and Protestants—were very bigoted. The Catholics—if a girl with any Irish name came to my house, my father would say, “Is she Irish? Is she Catholic?” So, it was different. And he drove the car, and had the megaphone, telling everybody to vote for Hoover, because Al Smith was running against him, and he was the first Catholic to run for President. And my father was very much against this! So I rode around in the car with him every night; I was eight years old. And I have a little elephant sitting up on that shelf that one of the men gave me, because he said, “You were part of our campaign.”

LEVINE: Wow!

HOLVERSEN: That was an interesting part.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So was your family religious? Were your family religious?

HOLVERSEN: Yes, they went to church. They were active in the Methodist Church.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah.

HOLVERSEN: Yeah. We all went to church every Sunday, and also Sunday night, then, and Wednesday.

LEVINE: Oh!

HOLVERSEN: You know.

LEVINE: So, was your husband religious, too?

HOLVERSEN: I would say average; not the same as my mother.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: They went to church because that’s the thing that you did.

LEVINE: Yeah. So, let's see. So, well, you have no recollections of England. How do you think about yourself? Do you think about yourself as completely American?

HOLVERSEN: Yes, yes. Except I went back to England in 1929, and I also went back in 1975, to visit with some of my relatives. But when I was over there, I enjoyed my visit, was so glad to get back to see America. Although when I went in 1975, we went, my uncle, they were having a farewell party, because I was leaving to come back to the States. And my uncle wanted to take me to Liverpool's museum, which he said is a very fabulous museum. So while they were there getting ready for the party, he would take me there. While I was there—when we got there, it was closed. You could go in, but you couldn't go into the exhibits. And he said, because the Queen was having her bounty, where she was coming in and judging the paintings?

LEVINE: Oh.

HOLVERSEN: And she said, so they said, or my uncle said, "Oh, I'm so disappointed!" He said, "My niece is here from the United States of America, and I wanted to show her a lovely magazine." The lady said, "Wait a minute." They sent a guard down, and took us around the whole museum!

LEVINE: Wow!

HOLVERSEN: And of course, we did laugh. We said, "They wouldn't have done that in America!"

LEVINE: [Laughs]

HOLVERSEN: They would have told you to get lost, you know! But that was an interesting tour. He went back and told everybody, "I'm bringing a VIP home."

LEVINE: [Laughs] Now, so did you have children then?

HOLVERSEN: Yes.

LEVINE: How many children?

HOLVERSEN: I had two boys.

LEVINE: Two boys, okay.

HOLVERSEN: Donald and [unclear]. And one has three children, two boys and a girl, and the other one has two girls. So I have five grandchildren.

LEVINE: Great, uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: The oldest is twenty-four. Nobody's married yet.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: I'm waiting for that day, if I make it.

LEVINE: Yeah, oh, wow! So what do you feel proud of? What makes you feel satisfied, that you've done in your life, when you think about it?

HOLVERSEN: Well, I think I had a very good marriage. I waited four years to get married, because I didn't want to get into what my mother had gotten into. But I had a very good husband, which I lost thirty-two years ago. And he left me with two real nice boys who have taken very good care of me. Especially now, they're here all the time.

LEVINE: Oh, nice.

HOLVERSEN: And my grandchildren—I really have a good family, so I'm very proud of my family.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: And I belong to the—I'm a past matron of the Eastern Star, and I'm now treasurer [unclear]. I've been there for eighteen years. I'm very active; I've always been active, and those two things I still go to.

LEVINE: Good, great. So now, did you visit Ellis Island at some point?
[Telephone rings]

HOLVERSEN: Way, way, way back. Way back.

LEVINE: Do you feel like you have a special connection with it?

HOLVERSEN: The fact—yes I do, in a way, because I came in there.

LEVINE: Right.

HOLVERSEN: And you know, there aren't many people left. In fact, I don't even know of anybody that I associate with, that came through Ellis Island. Excuse me. I do feel a closeness.

LEVINE: Wait, we're going to pause.

[Pause in Recording]

LEVINE: Okay, well is there anything more that you could say that has to do with the fact that you and your mother and father came from England? I mean, like growing up and anything, did that make any kind of a difference, do you think? The fact that you had come from another place, your mother and father?

HOLVERSEN: I don't think so, because I was so young when I came over here, and I kind of felt Americanized.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HOLVERSEN: And I love this country, and I've been very, very active the whole time.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

HOLVERSEN: And of course, when I got sick four years ago, the kids brought me in here.

LEVINE: Oh.

HOLVERSEN: And this has been a wonderful place.

LEVINE: So in other words, you're in independent living? You don't get any services from living here, this is just like an apartment?

HOLVERSEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: I see.

HOLVERSEN: You have security. If I get sick, I just take the phone off the hook, and a nurse comes running up.

LEVINE: Oh, that's nice.

HOLVERSEN: You know, it's good. And like the other day, when I had this session, I just called right down, and the nurse, she came right up and she took care of everything, called the doctor, and got me to the hospital, called my daughter-in-law.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: So I do like the services here.

LEVINE: Yeah, so you're looking forward to one of your grandchildren getting married? Is that going to be a highlight for you?

HOLVERSEN: I don't know when that'll be!

LEVINE: [Laughs] Okay.

HOLVERSEN: I have a couple that paired off for so long, but they're going through college.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah.

HOLVERSEN: Tomorrow we celebrate my youngest grandson's graduation. We're having a party.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Oh, great! Okay. Let's see. I'm trying to think. Do you remember when September 11th happened?

HOLVERSEN: Yes.

LEVINE: Where were you, and what was your response?

HOLVERSEN: I was downstairs in the café in Bellingham, and somebody came running down. And all I was thinking of my friends that worked there.

LEVINE: Oh.

HOLVERSEN: And I knew one of my close friends who had moved to Florida, her grandson was down there. He worked on the eighty-first floor. And all I could think of was him. Because I knew them; they were Scottish people, came from Scotland. And—

LEVINE: Something's making a beep.

HOLVERSEN: Oh.

LEVINE: You're hooked up now, so wait. Let's—

[Pause in Recording]

LEVINE: Resuming here. We were talking about Broadway.

HOLVERSEN: Yes, just before I was married, my minister from my church's daughter, Carol Powton, was married to Judy Garland's brother-in-law.

LEVINE: Okay.

HOLVERSEN: And she also is very talented. And she knew I danced and sang, and she got me involved with this players' group in New York, with lots of rehearsals in between. And I did that for about four years; I danced and I sang.

LEVINE: Now when you say a players' group, it was like a group that performed?

HOLVERSEN: Yes, it was called the Metropolitan Players' Group, but it had nothing to do with Metropolitan Life.

LEVINE: Oh.

HOLVERSEN: And Manhattan Center is where we did the different shows. And they got a group that was going to go, they were going to start traveling. And I was dating my husband. He said, "Either that or me." So I took the me! [Laughs]

LEVINE: Did you ever regret it?

HOLVERSEN: I wasn't really what you'd classify as a professional. You know, it was just—

LEVINE: Mm-hm. But were you happy that you made that choice?

HOLVERSEN: Oh, yes, very happy! Yeah, I think it's—I think any kind of show business is a hard place.

LEVINE: Yeah, I think so, too.

HOLVERSEN: And I also wish I knew the whereabouts of some people that I associated with.

LEVINE: It sounded like you had a lot of interesting contacts in New York.

HOLVERSEN: That's right. And that time, you don't even think of all these people. I have pictures of some people, but—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: Like Theodore Roosevelt. I was at a group that went to Hyde Park, and I do have good pictures of him.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: I talked too long. So, but that was the extent of my show business. Then I got married; it was an entirely different life.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, did you work after you got married?

HOLVERSEN: Yes, for a while, I worked in a local place called Plas-Chem, because during—you know, so the kids could find me—

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: --and I'd be around them. But other than that. Oh, I worked in the Metropolitan Life, but I did that—not the Metropolitan, the Western Union.

LEVINE: Oh.

HOLVERSEN: I did that before I got the job in the Metropolitan Life.

LEVINE: What did you do there?

HOLVERSEN: I was a teletype operator. I answered the phones, and when different calls would come in, and sometimes late at night. Father Coughlin was a big speaker, and as soon as he finished talking, all the calls would come in, commenting on his speech. And I would take a lot of phone calls. I did a lot of telegrams, sent telegrams to different areas. They would send telegrams to people, and to him.

LEVINE: Now what, was he on the radio?

HOLVERSEN: Yes, he was a great speaker. Everybody listened to him. He was a Catholic—Father Coughlin, I guess a Catholic priest.

LEVINE: Priest, yeah. Coughlin?

HOLVERSEN: Coughlin, C-O-U-G-H-L-I-N. Very popular. You know, it's funny, you bring back to me all these memories—

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

HOLVERSEN: --that are scattered around!

LEVINE: So in other words, this priest would speak, and then everybody would wan to send telegrams?

HOLVERSEN: Yeah, they'd send telegrams to different people, or to him, you know, telling him how good his speech was, or what they liked about it. And

it's amazing how we knew as soon as he was off the air! Somebody would say, "Father Coughlin just finished." We knew that the phones were just going to be so busy! And that was several, any speaker that was on, any campaign that was on, the same thing would happen.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, that must have been an interesting job?

HOLVERSEN: Yes. And then I also was a demonstrator when they—and I cannot remember the name; I tried to think of that last night—where you send messages, and they would arrive in a different area?

END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

HOLVERSEN: --well, it's all computer!

LEVINE: Right.

HOLVERSEN: But I was one of the girls, we sat and we showed an audience how you could put this message in a machine, and it would be sent to, like, Chicago. But the machines had to be geared for that. You know, like, from New York to Chicago, or New York to Seattle. It wasn't a case of all over, like they do now.

LEVINE: So like--?

HOLVERSEN: So that was interesting.

LEVINE: How did the message go in? In what kind of form?

HOLVERSEN: Well we had—it was a little box. And you'd type it on this facsimile, and you'd put it in the machine, and it would go. And it was so breathtaking, how you could just put this piece of paper in, and they'd get the message at the other end! You know, today we think nothing of it.

LEVINE: Right, wow! Are there any other things you can think of like that, that seemed to be a marvel at the time?

HOLVERSEN: And of course, I worked for Sears, Roebuck.

LEVINE: Oh!

HOLVERSEN: When we lived up in New City. We lived in New City for a while. And I was a teletypist there.

LEVINE: Huh. Now, was Sears and Roebuck mostly catalogue business?

HOLVERSEN: Yes, that was the catalogue.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. I guess Sears and Roebuck was a very popular store.

HOLVERSEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Way back, huh?

HOLVERSEN: Yeah. That was in the seventies, I guess.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember anything about the great Depression, which would have been in the thirties?

HOLVERSEN: Yes, I was—I remember the time that President Roosevelt was shot at. That was kind of—our country, we elected a new President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt? And he was the only President to be elected to his fourth term. And one of the big things that I remember, at that time, we had a great Depression. And unemployment people were all standing around. And the farmers were using shotguns to keep homes from being foreclosed. And I remember while Roosevelt was in Miami, a man by the name of Zangara, Z-A-N-G-A-R-A, was standing in the crowd around Roosevelt's car. And he shouted, "Too many people are starving to death." You see, he was doing a campaign, because he was being elected for the fourth time. This man fired several shots, and a woman jumped out of the crowd, and pushed his arm up. And they missed Roosevelt, but they hit the Mayor, Cervak of Chicago, and killed him.

LEVINE: Oh, really?

HOLVERSEN: I remember that incident.

LEVINE: Wow! Now, that would have been, I guess, broadcast on the radio, right?

HOLVERSEN: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Yeah. Can you say anything about the radio, and the part the radio played? I mean, it was an important part of people's lives, I guess?

HOLVERSEN: Yes. We had, I know in our house, we had—my father made up his own radio. And we had two sets of earphones.

LEVINE: Oh.

HOLVERSEN: Once in a while, they would allow me to listen, you know, to use them, because we only had two sets.

LEVINE: Oh, so you couldn't hear it, like, out in the room?

HOLVERSEN: No, no.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: No, you had to have earphones to hear the radio.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HOLVERSEN: That was the wireless.

LEVINE: Yeah. What about the early Victrola, and records, and music?

HOLVERSEN: Yes, I had a Victrola, and I had the gramophone that I used to wind up. In fact, I just recently got rid of it, in the past ten or fifteen years. And you know, in my age, we grew up in a real interesting age, because you bought loose milk in the grocer store. The bread was not wrapped. You picked a loaf of bread; they cut it for you. And telephones weren't in existence. There were several phones for the different families. You had to ring a certain ring to get [unclear], and everybody would listen in.

LEVINE: Party line.

HOLVERSEN: Yeah. And when you think of it, so much went on.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

HOLVERSEN: And I remember when the first air mail stamp came out.

LEVINE: Oh!

HOLVERSEN: Yeah, because my aunt, my uncle came from England, and he brought his bride-to-be. I was the flower girl. And when she said she was on her way, she sent us an air mail, and that was the first air mail stamp that ever came out. And that was in the early thirties.

LEVINE: Wow! Huh.

HOLVERSEN: When the N.R.A. came out, I was chosen from one of my classes to be in the parade, the tickertape parade in New York. And we had a song that we all learned, which I had the words to: "The Road is Open Again." And we all sang that, and the popular song "Happy Days Are Here Again." It was to put a long of men back to work, the N.R.A. came in.

LEVINE: Now, what's N.R.A.?

HOLVERSEN: National Recovery Act.

LEVINE: Recovery, uh-huh, okay.

HOLVERSEN: I really had, yeah. And I did spend some very early years up in the Catskills. My folks thought that they would like to be on a farm.

LEVINE: Oh!

HOLVERSEN: So I went to school in horse and buggy, and a wagon. And in the winter time we went on a bobsled.

LEVINE: No! You mean, you left Brooklyn?

HOLVERSEN: Yes.

LEVINE: Before you went to Pennsylvania?

HOLVERSEN: Yes. This was for one year, when I was in the first grade.

LEVINE: Oh.

HOLVERSEN: And then the winter was too bad for my Dad, he had arthritis so bad. So we had to move back. But that was an interesting year. And the farm where we stayed, this lady used to come, and her daughter swam the English Channel. And I don't know the name of this lady, but the daughter's name was Gertrude Ederle. And she swam the English Channel.

LEVINE: Hm.

HOLVERSEN: And she made me a costume, and she used to come out there in the summer time, and I'd see her.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: And I wore that costume many times. I got a prize with it. It was daffodil. But, this is kind of jumping around!

LEVINE: That's okay. That's okay. So in other words, do you think your father and mother thought life in Brooklyn wasn't all that they had hoped? They thought maybe a farm--?

HOLVERSEN: Well, thing of it is, circumstances. Like, [unclear], they both loved the country, because we used to go and visit his sister and brother-in-law, who settled up there, as a retirement place. And he just kind of liked it, so he thought he'd like. My mother loved taking caring of chickens, and their eggs, and so, and she loved it, and was very active in the church up there. And my kids still go up there.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh, I see. Did your mother and father ever think about going back to England, to Liverpool?

HOLVERSEN: No. I never, ever heard them mention it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: I never heard them say they were sorry they came.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HOLVERSEN: They realized how much better it was here.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, can you imagine what your life might have been, had you never come?

HOLVERSEN: I often thought of that. I often thought of what I would be doing.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HOLVERSEN: And I know when I went to England, to visit, in '75, I went to church three times, all in a Catholic Church.

LEVINE: Oh.

HOLVERSEN: Simply because my daughter-in-law said, my cousin's daughter said, "Oh, Fran, you wouldn't enjoy the Methodist Church, or any of the churches." So they had a new Cathedral in England, and I went there. It was beautiful. And one Sunday, of course, I was in Rome. We went to the Vatican. But it seemed that their life is entirely different now. When I used to think of how my father used to say, "England, they

wouldn't do this. England, they wouldn't do that." The people did not, for my liking, were not up to my specifications of what I felt my class.

LEVINE: Oh, really? Uh-huh.

HOLVERSEN: And my cousin's friends, they were married to black people, to Chinese people. I was surprised. And she said, "Oh, that's nothing!" So, I'm here, and that's—

LEVINE: And that's where you want to be?

HOLVERSEN: That's right.

LEVINE: Okay. All right, well is there anything else that you can think of that maybe we didn't hit on, that you would like to say about, you know, you and your mother and father coming to this country, and living out your life here?

HOLVERSEN: No. As I said, I kind of felt I led a sheltered life when I was young. However, when school was over, my father shipped me right up to the Catskills.

LEVINE: Oh.

HOLVERSEN: He didn't want me to mix with all the kids. And I learned to do things that other kids never did. I'd take care of chickens, eggs, milk cows.

LEVINE: Oh, great! So you had—

HOLVERSEN: So that added to my repertoire.

LEVINE: Yeah! So you had had both the country and the city life?

HOLVERSEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah, nice.

HOLVERSEN: I liked it. And I, as I say, enjoyed people. I enjoy being with people. And I was so excited when I heard you were coming out today!

LEVINE: Yeah, well I'm—

HOLVERSEN: I just hope I didn't skip around.

LEVINE: Well, I think we skipped, but it's all interesting. It's all good. And I'm really glad I got to talk with you. Okay, so—

HOLVERSEN: I'm sorry that I was coughing.

LEVINE: Yeah, well, I just hope you can get it under control.

HOLVERSEN: Well, I don't think I'll ever lose it. But right now, I'm just waiting to see what happens. I have to go for another test.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. I should mention that Mrs. Holversen just got out of the hospital, yesterday or the day before.

HOLVERSEN: Yesterday.

LEVINE: Yesterday. And you're suffering right now from cancer that's affecting your—

HOLVERSEN: Yeah, windpipe.

LEVINE: Windpipe, yeah, yeah. Okay, well, I want to thank you very much for a really interesting interview.

HOLVERSEN: Well, it really has been a pleasure, as far as I'm concerned!

LEVINE: Great!

HOLVERSEN: And I feel important!

LEVINE: Good! Well, I hope you and your family will visit Ellis Island. That would be nice.

HOLVERSEN: Yes, I would like to.

LEVINE: Okay, this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off, having spoken with Mrs. Frances Holversen, who came from England when she was only four and a half months old, in 1920.

HOLVERSEN: And I just turned eighty-five.

LEVINE: Okay, and she's eighty-five. And if it wasn't for the breathing, you'd be in good shape, right?

HOLVERSEN: Yes.

LEVINE: Okay, okay, signing off.

EI-1379/HOLVERSEN

END OF INTERVIEW