

EI-179

ALLAN GUNN

BIRTH DATE: JANUARY 8, 1916

INTERVIEW DATE: 6/20/1992

RUNNING TIME: 1:00:01

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

INTERVIEW LOCATION: SCHROON LAKE, NY

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 4/1993

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 6/1993

SCOTLAND, 1925

AGE 9

PORT OF EMBARKATION: GREENOCK

RESIDENCES:

- **SCOTLAND: GLASGOW**
- **THE US: NY, NY 158 ST.**

Oral Historian's Note: This interview was conducted in a rural location in northern New York State and includes many chirping birds from the surrounding forest. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of the Oral History Project, 2/2/1993.

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SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Saturday, June 20th, 1992. I am at Schroon Lake in upstate New York with Allan Gunn, who came from Scotland in 1925 at the age of nine. Mrs. Gunn is also present in the living room with us. Mr. Gunn, could we start with you giving me your birth date, please.

GUNN: My birth date is January 8th, 1916.

SIGRIST: And where were you born, sir?

GUNN: Glasgow, Scotland.

SIGRIST: Can you, did you live in Glasgow for, until you came . . .

GUNN: Until we emigrated.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little about what Glasgow was like at that time?

GUNN: Well, Glasgow was one of the main industrial cities, ship building on the river Clyde.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

GUNN: C-L-Y-D-E. And usually holidays was, one of the great holiday trips, I should say, was a boat ride up that river. And we also took trips to what we called Denoon, which was another little village north of Glasgow.

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SIGRIST: Can you spell that for us, please?

GUNN: D-U-N-O-O-N. We used to go there every year. We lived in what you would call an apartment, and the apartments there were a little different than the ones here. They ran the length of the building, or the width of the building, so that the rooms were in tandem. You went from the kitchen into a bedroom into a living room, and then you were on the other side of the street so that you could see on both one street and also into another street. We, as far as transportation went, we always used trolley cars, because those days we didn't have a car.

SIGRIST: Talk a little bit more about your apartment. Can you describe the building that it was in?

GUNN: Well, there usually, where we were there was two apartments on each floor, and I think it was about four or five floors. And there was a hallway, and the bathroom was out in the hallway. The bathroom was not in your apartment. And you go up the stairs, just walk up stairs into the hallway and you're out, there was a door on the right or a door on the left, whatever apartment you were in. And, as I said, you would enter the kitchen or you would enter the living room, and the rooms were in tandem, so that you'd have to go through one right through the other, and into the other into your apartment.

SIGRIST: It didn't make for very private situations.

GUNN: Usually they had curtains. They'd draw curtains to separate the bedroom from the kitchen, and another curtain to separate the living room.

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SIGRIST: How was the apartment heated?

GUNN: We used the old coal stoves in the kitchen. Like the old farmer, farm wood stoves that they have here, all black. We used to buy coal, and they had a big bin in the kitchen, and they'd just load that bin up with the coal, and then when they needed to use this same thing for cooking, and they'd use the same thing for heat.

SIGRIST: How was the apartment lit?

GUNN: They used gas in those days, and what would happen, you'd be sitting maybe reading or just sitting doing something or other, and the first thing you'd know the lights would start going dim, and you'd have to hurry up and get a shilling and put it in like a little coin box and then that, I don't know, I can't remember how long that would last, but there was a little incident. They started to put electric lights in but my grandmother was very old fashioned. And in her house she said they weren't going to break up her walls to put any new-fangled lighting system in. She was going to stay with her gas lights. So that was our type of lights that we had.

SIGRIST: Was it dangerous, the gas?

GUNN: I never heard of anybody having any problem. We didn't have tanks. Evidently it was piped in from a central system, because I don't recall having any tanks in that house. I remember they have the little meter box. We had to get a shilling or whatever it was when the lights started to go dim, and as soon as you put the coin in it would brighten back up again.

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SIGRIST: Describe the kitchen in the house for me.

GUNN: As I recall, on one side of the wall, about in the middle, there would be this big black stove, and that had the ovens and all that stuff. And on the other you'd have room for the kitchen table and chairs, and you'd have cabinets around it. They also had a bin next to the stove where they put the coal in. But it's just an ordinary kitchen as far as I can recall.

SIGRIST: Which room did the family spend the most time in?

GUNN: We spent, most of our time was spent in the living room. My father had an old organ, an old pump organ, and at that time the stops looked like doorknobs to me. And I used to love to sit on there. If I sat on the stool I couldn't reach the pedals, so I'd have to more or less slide off the stool, and I'd pump the pedals while my father would play the organ. And that was one of my great joys at that time.

SIGRIST: So your dad played the organ?

GUNN: He played the organ. He wasn't a professional player. He had picked it up himself, but he was very good at it.

SIGRIST: What kind of stuff did he play on the organ?

GUNN: On those days it was just the old type of Scottish songs at that time. There was no rock and roll stuff in those days. So it was practically the old type of songs that they used to play, "Loch Loman" and things like that.

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SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

GUNN: His name was Allan.

SIGRIST: And tell me a little bit about what he was like as a person.

GUNN: We thought he was very strict, but the funny part is he never really laid a hand on us, and he was always willing to do things with us. He worked hard. He'd come home and he always greeted us. He always made it a point to greet us. And we got along great as far as a family going. My father was very nice and pleasant.

SIGRIST: What did he look like?

GUNN: Everybody said I looked like him. So he was about my size, five, five seven or so. And he had a ruddy complexion and light brown hair. But he was jolly. He always had a smile.

SIGRIST: What did he do for a profession?

GUNN: He, over there, as I recall, they called him a boiler maker. And he was also a crane operator. And evidently it must have been like in a foundry, because I always heard him talk about the crane, problem with the crane, and problem with boilers and things like that. But he seemed to have a fairly good job because we were I guess what you'd call middle class, because we never seemed to want for food or rent money or anything like that.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

GUNN: She was Elizabeth Lawson Gunn. Her maiden name was Lawson.

SIGRIST: Is that L-A-W-S-O-N?

GUNN: S-O-N, yeah.

SIGRIST: And let me also ask you, what was your mother's temperament like, her personality?

GUNN: My mother was more of a serious type person. She was a rather religious person. Not a fanatic religious, but she believed in going to church regularly and she wanted us to go to Sunday school. And so she always took us to church and Sunday school. But my father was not a church-goer, and I never heard my mother really try to push him. She never seemed to push to have him do anything that he didn't want to do, because she figured he worked hard all during the week, and the weekend should be for what he wanted to do. And she used to apologize to the minister for my father not going to church, and the minister once told her, "That's all right, Mrs. Gunn. You come often enough for both of you." So that was quite an experience. But we had, maybe I shouldn't bring it up now, maybe bring it up later, after we arrived here. We had kind of a funny church experience.

SIGRIST: Well, good. Well, we'll talk about that when we get you to America.

GUNN: I figured we'll bring that up later.

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SIGRIST: We'll try to do this as chronologically as we can. Can you also describe your mother physically for me?

GUNN: She was tiny. She was probably about five foot two, five foot three. And, of course, in the upper years she was grey haired. She had very brown hair at one time. She had a beautiful voice. Her uncle wanted to train her, train her voice to be a singer because he went to Australia and he was invited to direct the choir in one of the big halls and it was quite an honor because every year they would select someone to direct this choir, and he was selected one year to do that. So I don't know how much more I can tell you about her. She was a rather serious type. She wouldn't even say, "Damn." That was a bad word. (he laughs) So that's the type she was.

SIGRIST: You said your mother was very religious. When you think back as a child in Scotland, what memory sticks out in your mind that shows how religious she was?

GUNN: Just the fact that every Sunday she would want to go to church, and she insisted that we go to Sunday school. But she wasn't a fanatical religious person. She just believed that she should go to church.

SIGRIST: It was just an important part.

GUNN: It was an important part of her life.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

GUNN: My father was in the navy when they met, and really that's about all I can tell

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you. I never really got into that, how they met. But he was in the navy, and it was during the Boer War he was in the navy that time. And he always told about the time, for one day he had off, one of his sailor friends invited him to go fishing, and they went out in a rowboat and went fishing and it poured and they never caught any fish. And that was the last time he ever went out fishing. (he laughs) So I really don't know how they met.

SIGRIST: Did you have brothers and sisters in Scotland?

GUNN: I have one sister.

SIGRIST: Younger or older?

GUNN: She is three years older.

SIGRIST: What is her name?

GUNN: Her name is Jean.

SIGRIST: And were there any other extended family in Glasgow?

GUNN: Oh, yes. We . . .

SIGRIST: You mentioned a grandmother already.

GUNN: And we had, let's see. There was another sister, two sisters. There was two on my mother's side. There was two sisters, two brothers and there was an adopted sister. She was left on my grandmother's doorstep when

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she was a baby, so my grandmother just took her in and adopted her. No formal adoption. In those days they didn't bother with formal adoptions. So she just heard the baby cry and opened the door and there was a baby in kind of a box, and she just took her in and raised her as one of her own.

SIGRIST: Did that woman know her beginnings?

GUNN: After she grew up she was told, and she did finally locate her birth mother. But she never really was closely attached to her. As far as she was concerned, my grandmother was her mother.

SIGRIST: Is this your mother's mother or father's mother?

GUNN: This was my mother's mother.

SIGRIST: Did you spend a lot of time with this grandmother?

GUNN: No, because by the time I realized what was going on she up and died. So I really didn't have too many years to spend with my grandmother.

SIGRIST: What about on the other side of the family? Were there grandparents?

GUNN: I we didn't do too much about my father's family. I'm still in contact with a cousin of my father's. She's up in her nineties, and she's in Scotland. And she still writes, oh, at least every Christmas we get a card from her. But there was never much said about my father's side of the family.

SIGRIST: He wasn't as close with his relatives as your mother's side was.

GUNN: No, he wasn't as close.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about being a little boy growing up in Glasgow. Let's talk about, for instance, what did you do for fun? What was entertaining at that time?

GUNN: Usually it was just playing what we called Kick The Can. You know, you get out there and kick the can. It's like baseball. When you kicked the can, you'd have to run to a base before someone picked the can up and tagged you. It was kind of a game to call Red Light here, one, two, three, four, ten, red light, you'd run and hide. But school was very strict, very strict in school.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about school as a kid?

GUNN: Oh, I remember I hated it. (he laughs) We started at five, and you just didn't talk in school. Unless you were asked to say something, you didn't talk. They were very strict, and teachers had full authority over you. In those days you could be strapped on the hand with a strap, or you could be hit by a ruler. And, of course, you didn't dare go home and tell your parents the teacher had to do that, because as far as your parents were concerned, the teacher was right. There was no such thing as child abuse. Of course, they didn't call that child abuse. And really, we didn't never hate our teachers for it actually, because a lot of times we felt we deserved it (he laughs), you know. So we took it in that kind of a spirit.

SIGRIST: Did that ever happen to you?

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GUNN: Well, I hate to admit it, it happened a few times.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any reason why it happened, specifically?

GUNN: Oh, I just happened to turn around and talk to the kid next to me while the teacher was talking, and that's a definite no-no. While the teacher's talking, you pay attention. And, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of your teachers, specifically?

GUNN: Not the names, but I still have two class pictures, when I was a kid, the whole class and the teacher. But I don't recall their names. I wish I did. I wish I had written it down when I had it. You know, you always wish you had done things at that time, but you forget.

SIGRIST: Describe the school for me, the actual building, or multiple buildings, whatever.

GUNN: Well, first to get to the school I had to cross a little bridge over the railroad tracks. And the school was, oh, it was kind of a very dismal-type building. It was a good size building, and I think it had about three floors. And just regular plain classrooms, but it wasn't a very well-kept building, old. And we didn't have much of a yard to play in. But we didn't really have many sports in school in those days. You went there to learn, not to play games.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did they teach you?

GUNN: Oh, we had the regular spelling, arithmetic, geography, history. We also, in

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those days, we had to learn a Bible passage. Every morning we had to recite a Bible passage first thing. And just the regular things, like we . . .

SIGRIST: Was the school under some religious denomination?

GUNN: No, it was a public school.

SIGRIST: What denomination were you?

GUNN: I was Presbyterian over there. Now I'm Methodist.

SIGRIST: What, you said you had to go over a little bridge.

GUNN: You know, well, you know, it was a good-sized bridge, length-wise, to go over railroad tracks.

SIGRIST: Was the neighborhood near a railyard of some sort?

GUNN: Yes. Well, see, the school. I was in Glasgow and the school was in what they call Dennison, so the bridge and the railroad tracks separated the district. So therefore I had to walk down the street, like make a U-turn, come up the next street, because that's where the bridge was over the railroad tracks, and across the railroad over the bridge. And the school was about a block away from that area.

SIGRIST: Did you bring your lunch to school?

GUNN: Yes, we brought a, along a paper bag. My sister and I, we walked to school

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with our little paper bag and our sandwiches in it.

SIGRIST: What kinds of food did you eat in Scotland? What kinds of, what was your favorite food that your mother cooked?

GUNN: Well, sandwiches. It was similar to here. Sometimes you'd have cheese, and you'd have similar, like ham. And sometimes you'd have egg sandwiches. So it was actually, that part was similar to what we do here.

SIGRIST: What about dinnertime? When you think back, what did your mother make that you really liked, your favorite . . .

GUNN: Over that time over there, meat and potatoes was your main course. And it also, throw in a vegetable, peas or earth, some type that you liked. Because I hated carrots and spinach. (he laughs) So, but you'd have to eat it. No matter what they put out, you had to eat it. There was no such thing as, "Nah, I don't like that, I'm not going to eat it." You know, you ate it or you did without, and that's about the size of it.

SIGRIST: Where did your mother buy the food?

GUNN: Well, there was regular stores. There was grocery stores and there was fruit stores and they were separate, you know, very seldom a store with everything like you have now. It was all little stores. Little fruit stores and little grocery stores and meat stores, like that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a specific chore that you had to do in your apartment that was uniquely your's?

GUNN: Not really. I know we had to pick up our clothes all the time. We didn't dare go home and just leave our clothes laying all around. We always had to, we were always brought up to be neat, to put our clothes away. But as far as, we never really had any specific things. Of course, my mother would send us to the store once in a while, and I'd get downstairs and I'd forget what it was and I'd yell up two floors from the sidewalk. I'd yell for my mother. "Did you say buy me this?" You know, and my mother would, "Shh. You're not supposed to yell." (he laughs) I can remember doing that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember an instance as a child that you did something that upset your parents very much?

GUNN: Uh, yes.

SIGRIST: What did you do?

GUNN: She bought me an outfit one time, like a Buster Brown hat. And it was like, maybe you'd call it like a blouse now, and it hung way down outside. And I always thought it made me look so much like a girl and I hated it. And I tried to take it off and all this and that, and I'd be forced to wear it. So one time we're in the trolley car, and I stuck my head out the window so my Buster Brown hat would fly off. So that upset them.

SIGRIST: How were you punished for that?

GUNN: Well, in the trolley car she didn't do much, but another experience we were walking down the street. No, that was later on. That was a later story. But I

got a little spanking when I went home.

SIGRIST: Who was the disciplinarian in the family?

GUNN: My mother. But the funny part was my mother would always say, "Wait till your dad comes home." But my dad never spanked us. But then we'd always worry the rest of the day waiting for my father to come home because we didn't know what we were going to get. But more than half the time she didn't even tell them. But he never laid a hand on us.

SIGRIST: What were you like as a little boy? If you had to describe yourself as a little boy, how would you describe yourself?

GUNN: I'd say I was very timid and quiet. But my mother always claimed when I was a child and a baby I never shut my mouth. I cried and cried and cried. In fact, she says I was supposed to get christened. The minister was supposed to come to the house and baptize me, and I happened to fall asleep when he came. And she told the minister she didn't care if the Lord Himself came, she wasn't going to wake me up (he laughs) because she was so fed up with me crying. In fact, she said she was tempted to take me down to the dock and throw me in the river. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about why, who made the decision to come, and who wanted to come, and all that sort of thing, to America.

GUNN: The only thing I can recall, as I previously stated, my mother's uncle went to Australia. We had a neighbor who came to America. My uncle kept writing that he would like us to come to Australia, and my father was leaning

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towards going to Australia. The other neighbor that came to America, he used to write and tell how nice it was here, and he had a job lined up for my father if he was interested. And my mother said, well, Australia's an awful far away place to go to, but she'd be willing to come to America. So evidently that convinced my father we'll try America first. So he came about two-and-a-half, three years before we did to get situated, and to determine whether he would like to immigrate. And, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Why did your father want to leave Glasgow in the first place?

GUNN: Just from listening to the stories that this neighbor used to write.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did the neighbor write? Can you remember?

GUNN: He'd say how pleasant and how nice the climate, for one thing. And even the winters were so nice compared to our winters, which were very dreary and mostly very damp. We didn't get much snow in those days. And he said the kids seemed to have so much more fun over here, than what they had. They seemed to have more things to enjoy life with. So that's, he decided to come over and find out.

SIGRIST: As a little boy, what did you know about America?

GUNN: Nothing. Actually nothing at all. Not really much at all. The fact that I, when somebody would tell me New York, and that sounded like a yacht to me, and I used to picture a big yacht or something like that, you know. But I didn't really know anything about it.

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SIGRIST: Do you remember when your father left?

GUNN: I would say it was probably about 1922.

SIGRIST: But do you remember him actually leaving? Do you remember . . .

GUNN: Yes. I remember going down to see him off on the boat. It was the S.S. Mettagama. I can remember, visualize that. Of course, when you're a kid, the boat seems huge.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the boat?

GUNN: Mettagama. M-E-T . . . I don't know what it was, M-E-T-T-A-G-A, or M-E-T-I-G-A, but I know it sounded Mettagama.

SIGRIST: When you went down to see him off, was that the first time you had seen a big boat like that?

GUNN: Well, I'd been on smaller boats. Like I said, we used to take vacations to Dunoon and up the River Clyde. And they would be probably about the size of the Hudson River Dayliners. But, of course, they can't compare to the oceanliners. But that was about the difference in the size.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when your father left, the interaction between your mother and father?

GUNN: It was kind of an upsetting period because my mother didn't know how she was going to make out dealing with the two kids alone. And he was a little

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upset. He wrote quite regularly. So, I mean, we always heard from him.

SIGRIST: Talk a little bit about those intervening years when Dad was gone. How did you support yourself and what it was like to not have Dad around.

GUNN: It was hard, because we were used to having my father come home and greet us and play with us. And for the first six weeks or a month, come every three months or so, it was hard on all of us. But then we got used to the fact that he wasn't there, and we read a lot, even in those days we'd read quite a bit. And we'd go out and play with our friends.

SIGRIST: Was he sending money?

GUNN: Oh, yeah. He'd send money to support us.

SIGRIST: What job did he get when he came?

GUNN: He had a job lined up as a crane operator, but then when he wasn't, because he wasn't a citizen, as a, it didn't materialize, so he got a job as a streetcar conductor. And he used to write about his experiences, and it was, that was a job he got at that time. Of course, he changed jobs later on after we came here.

SIGRIST: I wanted to ask you a question, actually, about Australia. Did a lot of Scottish people go to Australia? Was that the other alternative?

GUNN: Yeah. That seemed to be, they either went to Australia or came to America. That seemed to be the two main areas that they were interested in.

SIGRIST: Were there a lot of people leaving Scotland at that time?

GUNN: Well, of course, being a child you didn't really know that much, how many people were going or not. I didn't really, couldn't say.

SIGRIST: So your father's in America for two-and-a-half years.

GUNN: Well, two, two-and-a-half years, thereabouts.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the process of you all getting ready to go?

GUNN: Well, as I said, he wrote quite a bit, and he'd write quite a bit about it. And my mother finally told us that it had been decided. She used to talk about it, and have our thoughts on it, you know. We sort of, of course, we'd go where our parents go. What else could you do, you know?

SIGRIST: Did you have feelings, though, about leaving Scotland? Did you want to go?

GUNN: Yeah, I was sad, because I had friends there. In fact, I still hear from one of my school friends, and I still hear from his sister. His sister and my sister were great friends, and her brother and I were great friends, and I still hear from them. In fact, he's in my school pictures that I still have.

SIGRIST: Where did you have to go to get your papers all taken care of?

GUNN: What papers?

SIGRIST: Your immigration papers. Did your mother do that in Glasgow, or did she have to go somewhere to do it?

GUNN: No. She did that, they went through all that over there before we left.

SIGRIST: Do you remember packing?

GUNN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What did you take?

GUNN: Boxes and old suitcases with a cord around them (he laughs), and straps around them. All our clothes, and some mementos that we were afraid would get lost, and . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything specifically?

GUNN: No, not really. But she wanted all her pictures and some of her fine china. I remember that.

SIGRIST: How did she pack the china?

GUNN: Oh, she wrapped them up in papers and each piece was wrapped up in paper and put in a box very carefully. And when we arrived here, when the porters or whatever you want to call them, and a ship came to get the luggage, she was very specific about it and told them, "Be careful of this box because my good china is in it." And he immediately picked it up and

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heaved it on the deck. (he laughs) She was so upset and mad. I can remember that.

SIGRIST: Did it all break?

GUNN: No, fortunately. There was a couple of pieces cracked, but not the whole. Anyway, she was very upset about that.

SIGRIST: What port did you leave from?

GUNN: Uh, I think it was what we called Greenoch.

SIGRIST: Spell that, please.

GUNN: I think it was G-R-E-E-N-O-C-H. I'm not quite sure, but I believe that was one of the main, and I believe that sounds like the place.

SIGRIST: Is that near Glasgow?

GUNN: Yes, not too far. In fact, that was my first taxicab ride from home to Greenoch to get on the boat. And the boat couldn't come all the way in to Greenoch. It had to anchor outside a ways, and you had to go on a little tender and they would take you out to the boat, and you had to go in a big, like a side door to the boat. And I can remember that just as plain, that little boat going up and down, and you're trying to go up the ramp to the other boat, and it's weaving and bobbing. (he laughs) I remember that. (tape ends)

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END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: . . . the name of the boat?

GUNN: That was the Athenia.

SIGRIST: And tell me what it was like, as a little boy, to be in this big boat.

GUNN: Oh, it was great. We were fortunate enough to have a cabin. A lot of passengers were in the hold, and they'd have a ladder. And it would be a good day, they'd have it open, they'd have a ladder down the hold and they could come, they'd come up on the deck. But we were very fortunate. I don't know how come we had the cabin. I don't remember that. But we had even an outside view, and it was great. We never got really seasick, but we might just as well have got seasick the way we felt at times. But being a kid, we had the run of the boat and all the crew. They treated us great because being a kid I guess they took special interest in us, and we'd be up and down all the different decks and running around. Even when it was stormy we'd get up on deck until they caught us and chased us back inside because to us the waves were huge. They'd seemed like to tower all the way over the bow of the boat, you know. But the food was great, you know. We were never used to dining out, and here to sit at a dining room table and have everything served to you, that was an experience in itself.

SIGRIST: In a dining room, did they have to make certain accommodations because the boat rocked?

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GUNN: Oh, yes. You would feel it. Sometimes you'd have to hold your, of course, that time we used to take tea. Your teacup, you'd have to hold it because sometimes the boat would be rocking quite a bit. They weren't stabilized like the newer liners, and they did rock quite a bit.

SIGRIST: Can you describe your cabin for me?

GUNN: It was very small, bunk beds. It had four, well, two bunk beds. There'd be four beds, and they had this porthole, and my sister and I had one side. I had the upper bunk bed, and she had the lower bunk bed because she was the older. (he laughs) And my mother had the other one. But I don't think the cabin could have been more than about ten-by-ten, or something like that. They were very small.

SIGRIST: Was there anything else in it other than the beds? Toilet facilities?

GUNN: Just a little sink. No, the toilet facilities were out in one of the passageways. It was just a little sink with running water. And we had the bathrooms and showers outside in another area. And just the bunk beds and a couple of chairs, and there was like a little desk and a wash bowl.

SIGRIST: Were there any kind of, do you remember any kind of safety drills that you had to be . . .

GUNN: Yes, we did. Every, more than one time they rang the bell and these stewards came running down. "Everybody on deck for safety! Everybody on deck!" Get up there, and then they'd put the life jackets on us to show us

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how to be prepared. I think we had two of them on the trip. It took us about six days, at that time, to come over.

SIGRIST: And what season is this?

GUNN: I believe it was December. It seems to me we came in December, because it seems to me it was a cold time of the year when we arrived.

SIGRIST: Did they have any organized activities for the visitors, for the passengers on the deck that you can remember?

GUNN: It wasn't really organized. It was voluntary things. They'd get together, and some people would get up and sing and dance, but it was not really an organized. But they used to make up their own entertainment. But, of course, my sister and I, we had a great, we had a ball running around that ship. We thought it was great.

SIGRIST: What was it like to be up on deck, being a little kid looking out at the ocean?

GUNN: It looked so vast. It was the first time I'd been on such a big boat. And you'd stay and look at the open deck, you'd look way up to the bow of the ship, and it looked like it was a mile long, you know. And, oh, we'd run from one end to the other and we'd, we probably were a nuisance to a lot of the passengers. (he laughs) We'd be up and down. We enjoyed going up and down the steps while the boat was weaving and holding on.

SIGRIST: Were there lots of other kids on the boat?

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GUNN: There wasn't too many other children on the boat. It was kind of, we didn't make too many friends with anybody.

SIGRIST: Did your mother enjoy, was this a positive experience for your mother, being on this boat, or was this an ordeal to control the children?

GUNN: Oh, we weren't bad kids. If she said, "You stay put," just we stayed put. But if she said, "You can go out and play," without any restrictions, that was heaven. (he laughs) We did what we wanted. But over there when children were told to do a things, they did it. There was no, maybe, "I don't want to." You know, it was just, in those days there was no such thing like that. You, they said, "You sit down," you sat down. They said, "You sit down and don't move till I get back," you sat there and you didn't move till they got back. So she didn't have any trouble that way with us.

SIGRIST: Were there any other people who were friends of your's, or people from your neighborhood that were on this trip also?

GUNN: No. No. We were strangers to everybody.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

GUNN: Yes. Everybody had to run to one side of the boat to see. Of course, some people saw when it wasn't even anywhere near. (he laughs) "Oh, I see the Statue of Liberty." And everybody would go, "Where? Where? Where?" And, of course, we weren't even near enough to see it, you know. And I do recall seeing it, and everybody looking.

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SIGRIST: What about seeing New York from the boat?

GUNN: Oh, it was, to see those tall buildings. Even then, you know, those were tall compared to what we had. And it was huge. Of course, one of our worries was, "Is my daddy going to find us?" So that was a lot of our worries. A big place like that, how is he ever going to find us? How will he know where we are?" You know. And it was, it was a worry.

SIGRIST: Well, talk about the Ellis Island experience and being at Ellis and what happened there.

GUNN: I can remember docking, and I remember them leading us off the boat, going up those steps into the hall. And I remember the rows and rows of people, and waiting in line. We'd shuffle up a few steps, and then you'd wait and shuffle up a few more steps. And you finally came to stairs, and you went up the stairs, and the doctors would be up on the top of the stairs. And he would ask you different questions. And I can remember, the main thing I remember him rolling back my eyes, because I was afraid of people touching my eyes. And I always remember him putting something in and rolling back my eyes up and looking in my eyes. And, of course, that was a worry to your parents, or whoever was with you, because suppose one of the children didn't pass inspection or suppose the kids passed and the parent didn't pass. And it was a concern. What do you do, you know? But that's all I can remember, really, of the Ellis Island part was I remember the building very plainly, I remember that it was wide and long. And I remember those lines. I can never forget those lines and that doctor. But yeah, he wasn't mean to us. I mean, that's just a normal examination. But we were fortunate because we didn't seem to have any problem.

SIGRIST: Was Ellis crowded?

GUNN: Uh, yeah. I would say there were lines and lines of people. There was an awful lot of people there. It took a long time.

SIGRIST: How long were you on the island?

GUNN: It seems to me we were, we must have been on there, well, at that time I'd say probably about eight to ten hours by the time we got, because it was a slow process, there were so many people having to get checked out. It seemed to me it was that long. Maybe it wasn't, you know.

SIGRIST: Were you carrying your luggage during this process?

GUNN: Not all of it. Just kind of personal things that we wanted. We'd have smallest things. Some people carried everything. But they had, I don't remember, I can remember after we got through, when we went to get our luggage, they had big alphabets all along the pier, like A-B-C-D. And that's where you went to get your luggage, under your last initial, because all the G's would be together, luggage, and all the A's would be together. So you had to go up there and you had to look all through all the luggage to find the stuff that you had left on the boat to be discharged. So that's how we got our luggage.

SIGRIST: That's where the porter threw your mother's china.

GUNN: That's right. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Tell me, who came to Ellis to meet you?

GUNN: My father came to Ellis. Of course, that was our big worry whether, whether he'd recognize her, or whether we'd recognize him, or whether he'd forget and not get there on time or, and that's where my mother was quite worried about that, too. Of course, she never showed it to us, because she didn't want us to be upset.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the reunion?

GUNN: Oh, that was great, to see my father again. Oh, yeah, I don't think you can really explain it.

SIGRIST: Where did you meet him? Do you remember?

GUNN: Outside Ellis Island on the outside. We went out a door and a lot of the people were waiting to meet, and we were outside there and we saw him outside there.

SIGRIST: So that was exciting.

GUNN: Oh, it was. Of course, we had been looking forward to it all the way over, because then we realized on the ship that we were finally going to see our father again. Because after being away for two-and-a-half years we had kind of gotten used to not being with him. But then it all came back to us, knowing that we were going to meet him again.

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SIGRIST: When you saw him in your mind, did he look any different to you?

GUNN: No. We had a picture of him just the same way he was when he left.

SIGRIST: Did he bring any gifts or anything that you can remember when you met him?

GUNN: He brought candy for us. I can't remember. I think I got licorice sticks. (he laughs) That was one of my favorites in those days.

SIGRIST: Where did your father take you when you left Ellis?

GUNN: We went staying with friends, I believe it was near Crotona Park. I think it was in the Bronx. I'm not sure. You might know that. But I believe that was in the Bronx. Then he stayed there maybe about two weeks, and he got a job as superintendent of a big apartment house up in Manhattan on 158th Street and Fort Washington Avenue. I don't know whether you know where that is. Between Riverside Drive and Broadway. And, of course, those days that was a very high class section. And he had about six black men working for him. And I have a story I can tell you about that. There was on black man, he, they all treated my sister and I great, and they were all great with even my father and mother. But one, he was very jolly, but every weekend he'd get drunk and he couldn't do his job. And my father kept threatening to fire him. And, of course, he would always butter my father up and he'd never fire him. And he always said to my mother, "Mrs. Gunn, some day I'm going to bring my car around and take you all for a ride." So one day he did. He brought this big black car around and took us all out for a ride. And later on my father had been talking to one of the other

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employees and he happened to mention it was so nice of so-and-so to take us out for a ride in his car, and the other guy said, "He don't own no car. He stole that car." So here I could picture if we'd ever been stopped, my mother being a very religious type, getting picked up for riding in a stolen car. (he laughs) So that would have been really embarrassing.

SIGRIST: That's funny.

GUNN: Try to explain that, that you were innocent and didn't know anything about the car being stolen. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: What did you see in New York that you had never seen before, like the subway, or something along those lines?

GUNN: Well, it was scary when we first rode in the subway.

SIGRIST: Tell me about what that was like for you.

GUNN: To go, well, to go way underground, and the noise. I think the noise scared us more than anything. And to us, being a kid, they seemed to be travelling awful fast. And we wonder how do you know where you're going underground. How do you know where you're going, or how you're going to get there. Between the noise and the crowds and being the first time you ever rode on the subway, it was scary.

SIGRIST: Because you had, I assume, a noticeable Scottish brogue at the time, did you ever find any kind of prejudice against you being an immigrant?

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GUNN: No. What was amusing to us, a lot of people would ask us, "How come you speak English so well?" Being from Scotland, you know, we'd kind of look at them. "Well, what were we supposed to speak?" You know? (he laughs) And even in school they would bring that up. "How come you speak English so well being over here such a short time?" And that kind of amazed us you know. But . . .

SIGRIST: That's the way Americans are.

GUNN: But then getting, coming out and seeing all the big buildings and the traffic, because we didn't have as many cars where we were. And it was, it seemed how nice and clean and things were.

SIGRIST: What's one thing you really didn't like about being in this country?

GUNN: I didn't like?

SIGRIST: Yeah. Is there something that you really didn't like, or that your parents, perhaps?

GUNN: I think my mother was strained, because she was a very quiet type and, of course, she, introvert. She didn't make friends very easily. And I think it was hard on her to be here not making any friends at all. It took her quite a while to get used to being like that. And shopping was different, the stores were different. And I can remember one time, over there when you went for beets, to buy beets, well, they call it beet root. And she went to the store here and she wanted to get some beet root. And the man looked at her and says, "I can give you beets, but I can't give you any root." (he laughs) So

things like that, different experiences that she wasn't used to. She found that a little difficult to get used to.

SIGRIST: Would you say that your mother, because of that situation, tended to stay at home all the time?

GUNN: Well, we didn't really go out very much. I don't recall going out very much, because you didn't have a car in the first place. After a while we did start going out. We'd go to walk. We had a little park not too far. You'd go on a picnic and things like that. And then we got braver and we'd go on the trolley cars and go further away and as the years pass we got more accustomed to it.

SIGRIST: Your father is the superintendent now of this apartment building. Was that the job he got after being a trolley car operator?

GUNN: Yes. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Talk about your father in America a little bit. It seems like actually he has an easy time of it. Did he like being here?

GUNN: Oh, yes. He enjoyed it. That's the main reason why we came, because here, in the wintertime, he saw how much fun the kids had with the snow, where we had a dismal time in wintertime. And he saw how much more fun the kids had, and there were so many more things that they could do and enjoy. And I think that was the main decisive point for us to come, because he realized that we could have a better life. Not that we didn't have a good life as far as living income goes. We seemed to be all right there. In fact,

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we had a harder time here for the first number of years, because our income wasn't near what it was on the other side. But, of course, other things make up for it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the first time you were confronted with a lot of snow?

GUNN: Oh, that was great. The first time we got a lot of snow, somebody showed me a sled. And, of course, I'd never seen a sled before. I didn't know what, I had turned it upside down. I thought you sat inside and held onto the rails. I didn't know you ran it on runners and laid on top. And the amount of snow, in those days when they plowed it used to pile up so high we used to make caves through the snow banks, and we had a great time. We had a little park not too far away, kind of a hill. And we used to have a great time sleigh riding down this hill, and that was something.

SIGRIST: How did you Americanize? How did you, did you want to be like the other kids? Maybe you didn't even feel different than the other kids, actually.

GUNN: I didn't really feel any different. In school, we went to school. And of course they didn't know exactly where to place me. They tried me in probably a low grade, and I'd go home to my parents and I said, "My goodness," I said, "they're only spelling three or four letter words, and we were spelling eight and twelve letter words," you know, but I would be in there maybe two or three days and they found out that I was too advanced for that grade. Of course, you can't blame them. They didn't know where to put me. So this was a hit-and-miss error. And first thing you know they'd moved me up to another grade and moved me up. But I was very surprised, even then, at the lack of discipline in the schools here at that time. And I couldn't get over

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the fact that the teachers didn't strap you or hit you in the hand with the ruler, you know. Because I'd go home and said, "Gee, the kids were making paper airplanes and throwing them around the classroom, and I sit there with my mouth open." We never did, we were never allowed to do things like that. But after they finally found a class where I was more or less in grade, and I didn't do too bad in school. I seemed to get along and catch up. And I finally started to make friends, my sister started to make friends, and we became Americanized.

SIGRIST: Your sister's a little bit older than you. Did she, how did she take to America?

GUNN: Oh, fine. We both seemed to get along all right. My sister was more outgoing than I was. I was a very, uh, quiet. And it was hard for me to make friends. I just never put myself out. Not that I didn't want to, I just never seemed to bother.

SIGRIST: Did your mother or father ever want to go back to Scotland?

GUNN: They went back on the visit, but they never really wanted to go back to stay. But it was a long time before they went back.

SIGRIST: How long?

GUNN: Oh, good grief, I think it must have been twenty years. And I've never been back.

SIGRIST: Did your mother, did other members of your mother's family emigrate from

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Scotland to America?

GUNN: Uh, the one sister that was adopted came over.

SIGRIST: To live.

GUNN: To live, and she married and raised children here. The others, some of the others have been over on a visit, but that's the only other one, as far as the family goes, that emigrated.

SIGRIST: I have two final questions for you. The first one is how do you think your life would have been different if you'd stayed in Scotland? What do you think would have happened to you?

GUNN: (he sighs) I'd have been in the service over there for one thing, and it wouldn't have been near as good as it was here. That would have been one thing. In fact, there is a good chance I wouldn't be here now had I been over there. That's one thing there, a big difference. And I think my livelihood would have been different. And, uh, I was going to tell you a little story about when I became Americanized. We were going, my mother and my sister and I were walking along this street, and she told me to do something, and I said, "No." I thought I was safe being out in the street. Well, the first alley that we came to, up we went and down came my pants and I got a beating. (he laughs) So I wasn't quite a hundred percent Americanized yet. And another experience we had, we weren't here too long in Manhattan. My mother decided she had to find a church. So she, one Sunday she took my sister and I by the hand, and she walked us up and down different streets until we came to a church. And she saw this

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church, she walked in, we were halfway down the aisle, halfway down the aisle of the church, and she decided she saw some vacant seats, and she said, "Excuse me," to walk in, and they were all black people. Well, she grabbed my sister and I by the hand and hurried us out. Now I don't know whether it was because she was afraid or whether it was because she didn't want to offend them, figuring we were in the wrong place. But we had no experience with blacks. Where I lived we had no blacks, and we never had much. And so it was strange to go into that building, it was all black. It wasn't because we were biased, because we didn't know anything about them. (he laughs) But that was a kind of an experience, another experience we had when we first came here.

SIGRIST: Who do you think influenced you the most in your life, your mother or your father?

GUNN: Well, my mother being the disciplinarian, I think she probably influenced us more. Oh, my mother insisted that my sister and I take up dancing. She always insisted that we have some kind of thing. So we had to have Scottish dancing, and, of course . . .

SIGRIST: Is this in New York?

GUNN: Yes. Over in New York. And we'd do the sword dance, single sword, double sword dance, Highland Fling, Sailor's Hornpipe. And, of course, any time the church had some kind of function going on we were invited to dance, and I hated it. And we had our kilts, of course. And the only way I could get even and show my disapproval, when we did the double sword dance, I would walk off the stage and let my sister pick up the swords and

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I'd get the devil for it. But that was the only way I could show my disapproval without being downright disobedient.

(he laughs)

SIGRIST: You were rebelling in some way. Are you glad that your parents made the decision to come here?

GUNN: Yes, I am. I don't think I would have had as good a life. Because I have a cousin over there, and he writes. And from what he explains the conditions, I don't think I would want to live there. We keep talking about going back for a visit, but it's never materialized.

SIGRIST: Well, I want to thank you very much for letting me come out here to Schroon Lake and talk to you, Mr. Gunn.

GUNN: Oh, yeah. I'm glad you could make it.

SIGRIST: Oh, it's wonderful. A lot of wonderful stuff.

GUNN: I'm glad you could. Because when I was a kid New York in those days was so different from what it is now, and I just hate to go down there. My daughter lives a hundred and . . . Uh, 83rd Street in Manhattan. Of course, you could drive down, there's no place to park, no place to leave a car or anything. And I just do not enjoy going down to New York any more.

SIGRIST: I think New York has always been a horrible place. (he laughs)

GUNN: No. When we were kids it was great. You could walk anywhere any time.

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And everybody was so friendly. But you wouldn't dare walk some of the areas now.

SIGRIST: Well, I have to go back there tomorrow, so, this is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service with Allan Gunn in Schroon Lake in upstate New York.

END OF INTERVIEW