

EI-285

MARY JANE GRIFFITHS WILLIAMS

BIRTHDATE: MAY 30, 1914

INTERVIEW DATE: 4/18/993

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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WALES, 1923

AGE 9

PASSAGE ON "THE AMERICA"

PORT OF EMBARKATION NOT NAMED

RESIDENCES: ABERTILLERY

GERMANTOWN, PA; NANTICOKE, PA

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Williams is the sister of Enid Jones, Interview EI-286, Paul E. Sigrist, Jr, Director of Oral History, 11/7/1995.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. And I'm here today in April, 18th, 1993, in St. Petersburg, Florida at the home of Mary Jane Griffiths Williams. Mrs. Williams came from Wales in 1923 when she was nine years old. Well, I'm very happy to be here, and I look forward to talking with you and hearing your story.

WILLIAMS: Okay. I'll be glad to tell anything you'd like to hear. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Okay. Why don't we start by your saying your birthdate, and where you were born.

WILLIAMS: I was born in Abertillery, South Wales. And I was born on May the 30th, 1914, and came to this country with my mother and father and brother and sister.

LEVINE: Excuse me. Could you spell the place where you were born?

WILLIAMS: Right. Abertillery. A-B-E-R-T-I-L-L-E-R-Y.

LEVINE: Okay. We'll, we'll talk first about what you remember about your life in south Wales. Did you live in Abertillery the entire time before you came to the United States.

WILLIAMS: Yes, I did.

LEVINE: And what do you remember about that town?

WILLIAMS: Well, the thing that I remember a lot about the town, was, well, I think I was in third grade when I came to this country. But we used to live in a home. My

mother and father were buying their own home, and it was an attached house in a row of houses in Duke Street. D-U-K-E, Duke Street, Abertillery. And my sister and I used to play outside on what we called then the pavement. They call it today the sidewalks.

And we used to play hop scotch outside the house. Or we would be, play ball, bouncing the ball. Then we went to, my sister and I took dancing lessons. My mother used to take us to what we called the Market Hall in Abertillery every Saturday. And we used to have dancing lessons, such dancing, ballroom dancing they called it. Because in those days you danced with a partner, and everybody did the same dance. You didn't have separate dances. I mean, everybody did the same dance, and we learned three or four different dances at that time. And...

LEVINE: Excuse me just one second. I want to turn off the recorder. (break in tape) Okay. We're resuming now, after cutting down on some noise in the background. You were saying about you would go to market square?

WILLIAMS: It was called, not market square, went now from my, but it was market something. Can't remember now exactly the name. But it was in Abertillery. We

called in the market, huh.

LEVINE: Hall?

WILLIAMS: Maybe. Market Hall. That's right. Market Hall. And they used to, and it was just a big auditorium, more or less, you see. And they had, a, a teacher, and my mother paid for the lessons. And so we did all ballroom dancing. No individual dances. We didn't tap dance or anything like that. It was just more or less to learn you how, to teach how to dance with other people on, out in the. And, let me see, what else can I remember. About, at the time, just before we moved, there was a very serious offense. Two children whom we used to play with, my sister and I both played with them, were murdered. And they lived just two or three streets from where we lived, and it was, he was called, was called Harold. That was the man's name that killed her, killed the children. And it was all over the news everywhere, I guess. And, I can't think, maybe my sister will remember what the name of this was, this, you know, really it was a traumatic experience. But it happened while we were there, and we were, we left maybe a few weeks later or what, but my mother was very, very worried, because

these were two children, it could have been my sister or I, because we even knew the gentleman, where he lived in our vicinity, you know. He was a fairly young man. And at that time you never heard so much crime, of so much crime or violence, so that was really something that was almost unheard of, you know.

And that stayed with us for a while. But when we came to the States, we came to my mother's sister. We had been trying, my father had been trying for two years to get on the quota. Because in those days they had a quota, and you had to sign up if you wanted to come to the United States. And if there was room in the quota, there, so it was two years before my father got notice that he could come in July, 1923.

LEVINE: How long before you were actually able to sail did you find out? Do you know?

WILLIAMS: Oh, it wouldn't be, not too long. I would say six months, perhaps. Maybe not even that long. Because, the reason I say that is because we had to sell. We brought most of our things with us, but my mother had to sell her furniture, you know. We only brought, we had a big wooden trunk. She brought her feather bed, all her pots and pans, and her dishes, which she had a

good set of English dishes, of twelve, which only, maybe two or three cups got broken. Everything else came okay. And...

LEVINE: Maybe you could describe the house where you lived...

WILLIAMS: The house. We had a very, we had a very nice home. It was a, as I said before, what do they call it now? It, like what, well, what we would call attached house. And my, you'd go into the hallway, which was a long hallway, and to the right of you was the, well, we would call then the parlor. And then if you walked a little further on, there would be another door, and that would be the dining room, or your living area, where you lived mostly. And then from the dining room you went from that room into the back of the house, which would be what we called the back kitchen. And in that kitchen you would have the fireplace, which was coal fired. And you boiled your kettle, and everything that you did, you did there on the, in that fireplace. We didn't have an oven to my knowledge. I can't remember any oven. But we did have a baker that lived down the street, no more that five or six houses from where we were. And they had the same house. But the, the front room they used as a bakery. And we

would take our, my mother would take all her bread, because she baked her own bread. When she got it all ready, she would take it in the tins, what we called then, the bread tins, and take them to the baker, and he put them in his oven. And when they were done, why, we picked them up, my mother would pick them up.

And that's why I don't think we had an oven of our own. Although she used to cook roasts. On Sunday we would have roast lamb.

LEVINE: On a spit?

WILLIAMS: No.

LEVINE: No.

WILLIAMS: No. I was just ready, maybe it was an oven that, on the side of the, you know, we had a grate, with, with the fireplace. Perhaps my sister will remember. But I'm, my husband might. But anyway, even though he's never, was in my home then, because I met him in the United States. But at the same time his mother and father had the same type of a home, you see. So maybe he'd remember. But I, we always had a roast. On Sunday we always ate Sunday dinner at noontime. And

we would have vegetables and roast of, you know. My house that we were living before we came to the United States was a much nicer home than what we had when came to the United States.

LEVINE: Did you use the parlor. When, what would be the occasions for the parlor?

WILLIAMS: Yeah. This is the, for the parlor would if anyone died, you would bring their coffin into the parlor, and you always put something outside the door to show that there had been a death in the house, see. Because we did have, my brother was a twin. So my twin brother died when he was, I'd say sixteen days old or more. And they did have a little casket in, in that room. Because he was buried, you know, in a little plot, in a cemetery plot. But the parlor was used if you had company, or at Christmas time, which you had, enter, you entertained people. But it was only really used for entertaining other people. Normally the family itself, at least in our house. I don't know what other people did, but in our home, normally we just used what we called the middle room, because it was the middle, between the parlor and the kitchen, you see. And we always called that the

middle room.

LEVINE: Could you describe a Christmas in Wales?

WILLIAMS: Well, we ne, to my knowledge we ne, yes, we never had a Christmas tree. Christmas time was spent amongst your neighbors, and family, but neighbors primarily, because every neighbor in the street, my, people be, in our street we had many aunts and uncles, because all our neighbors were called aunts and uncle. And even though their last name, one of our neighbors, their last name was James. And we knew her by Auntie James and Uncle James. But it was their last name, you see. And then we had a neighbor across the street who had no children. And they were very close to us, and we to them. And we always, we had a special name for them. I don't know where it came from, but his, they used, we used to call him Dillar, the man. D-I-L-L-A-R, or A-H. Dillar we used to pronounce it anyway. And her name we used to call Ma, M-A, Johns, which their last name was Johns, J-O-H-N-S. So they were Ma Johns and Dillar Johns. And they were our two closest people. If my mother wanted to go anywhere or went out, she could always take us across the street and leave them, leave us with them. But we used to

have mistletoe in the house, and we used to have a stocking at Christmas time. Each one of us would have a stocking. And it was filled with an apple, an orange, nuts of all, mixed nuts of all kinds, and maybe a very sm, we'd have, we'd get a doll. Perhaps, my sister and I, we'd each get a doll, and my brother would get some little toy. But that was really, our Christmas actually was, and then we'd have a big Christmas dinner, with just our own family, or some of our relatives. And we would, my mother would make Christmas puddings, which she made in, what would they call it? We call them basins. Now that just like our earthenware pots. And then, after making the pudding, she'd put them in the pot, and cover them with a lin, a linen cloth I'll say, and then tie it around so that it was enclosed. And then she put those, she must have make perhaps six or eight puddings. And she would put them in a metal boiler, which she put on top of the, I'll say gas stove, because we did have a gas stove. That, and that was, we probably had an oven underneath the gas stove. That's, but we did have the open fire, because we had, didn't have heat, you see. We had no other heat other than the coal fireplace. But the, she put these puddings in this metal container. It's just like they used to use in this

country to, to do the clothes before we had electric washers, you see. And she boiled those there for maybe a day, twenty-four hours, until they were, on the, that would be several months before Christmas. And then at Christmas time we always had that pudding for dessert. We always had one pudding, and she would give some of her neighbors a pudding. In fact, I've had people bring me one of their puddings since I've lived in the United States, that they still make, and they still do this back there, I would say the older people, not the younger people I don't think. (she laughs) But anyway, that was our Christmas dinner. And we would make a sauce, what we call here a cream sauce to put over the pudding. Some people used to put a little liquor in, or wine. But we never did, because my mother and father were not, they were not tea-totallers exactly, be, but my father liked a glass of beer or something like that, but never any hard liquor. And we would take, they would take a little wine. Of course, when we were youngsters we were never allowed anything like that. But that was really our Christmas. Then at Christmas Eve, Christmas Eve, my mother and father had a party at our house and invited all the neighbors. And Christmas night the other neighbor would have a party. And the night

after Christmas is called, well, the day after Christmas is called Boxing Day. And it still is in Europe. At least in Great Britain it is. I don't know what about the other countries. Boxing Day was a big day because, Boxing Day, we went to visit any relatives or friends, and just wished them a merry Christmas, even though Christmas day was over, you know. And today they still do that. And when we came to this country, we carried on that same tradition, that on Boxing Day we met a lot of people in the town that we settled that were from Wales. And many people, we never knew them personally before, but they came from the same valleys, and so therefore they would come and visit us on Boxing Day, and bring their children with them, and that was a regular procedure I guess you'd call it. After Christmas day, you know, went. And normally they had two weeks for Christ, two weeks off Christmas time. Almost everyone was off two weeks for Christmas. And that's as far as I remember much about Christmas, I guess, until we came to this country.

LEVINE: What about the town or the village? Was it a, was it a large town?

WILLIAMS: It was a nice town. We had paved streets. The children in our school, what we went through. When they knew we were going to America, they would ask, do they have bananas in America, do they have pianos in America? And we couldn't understand. Well, of course, this is a civilized country, you know, this. But I don't think they understood that, because everybody said in America the streets were paved with gold. But we did not find that. (she laughs)

LEVINE: What about stories? Do you remember stories? Was there anyone in your childhood in Wales who told you stories?

WILLIAMS: My mother told us stories. My, Ma Johns across the street, she used to tell us stories. But just the same stories, like The Three Bears, Red Ride, Little Red Riding Hood. They're the ones that stand out in my mind most. Don't remember too many others really. But the town that we lived in, at the bottom of the street where we lived, there was a place called the drill hall. D-R-I-L-L. And this is what people in the service would go there for drills, or what, any, relating to the army, which I say the service, I mean any part of the service, I guess. That was what it

was built for. But then the people in the town used to use it for dances or any public event that was going on, why, you could use the drill hall. And the school that I went to was called the Queen Street School, because it was on Queen Street. And it only went up to, I'll say sixth grade. Maybe it went to eighth, I'm not sure about that. But we went three, I went there for three years. Now they started in England, they started kindergarten at, let's see, started school at five. So that would be first grade, would be started at five. And if you went to kindergarten, which I don't really remember, I ne, don't remember going to kindergarten. I don't know whether they had it or not. I think they did. But they started their school earlier, so that when we came to the United States, I started in third grade. I started, my sister was in fourth, so she started in fourth, but she had, been, had all that before she came, so they advanced her to the fifth grade. But me, they didn't advance me, so evidently what I was learning in third grade, I hadn't learned too much about, what they had here, too. So, then I just stayed in my regular grade, you know. But she did go a year ahead.

LEVINE: What was your school like that you attended in Wales?

WILLIAMS: The school very nice. It had a large play yard. And it was a stone structure. And it, we had good size classes. And we had small desks, that you could lift the desk up, just like the desk I had when I came to this country. You'd lift the desk up and put your books inside the desk. And the seat was attached to the desk. So therefore when you got into your seat your desk was right there. And they had the blackboards in the front of the room. I don't think they had them all around. They just had them the blackboard in the front of the room. And the teacher would be in the front of the room. And you had to put your hand up if you had to go to the bathroom. And the teacher would have to dismiss you to go to the bathroom. And they had to use the chalk that would used for the board, and then they had the erasers to erase the ch, the boards when you were finished. We didn't have too much, I don't think I ever had any homework to do at home. Everything we did we did in school up to that grade, third grade. I don't know what afterwards. (she laughs) And when you reach a certain age, I think it's twelve, I think it's still the same, you have to take a test. They call them A

Level or B Level, not sure, that you, I never had this, but, I mean, I know now from going back several times. And it was that way then, because I had a cousin who was a school teacher. And he was several years older than I was. Since I was nine, I'd say he was in his teens. Late teens. And that was my, one of, my first cousin. And he was going to a higher level school. It wasn't called a high school. But it was a school equal to our high school, I'll say. Because only people that passed these certain levels could go on to that particular school. If you didn't pass your certain level, then you had to go to a different school, you see. And he then went on to college, which, I think in those days, I think that he didn't have to pay a college tuition himself, because the government or someone paid, you know, for his tuition. But he taught school for many, many years back there. And he came to visit us in this country, too, twice since we've been here, since 1923.

LEVINE: What was your parents' attitude the English, do you remember when you were young?

WILLIAMS: (she chuckles) Ah, yes. I'll tell you this about my parents. My parents were not prejudiced in any way,

neither my father or my mother, for which I give thanks every day. Because my mother and father never were prejudiced. I'll say we never heard anything in the home that would be talking about other, the only time I think that I could say that I ever figured my mother might have been a little, but as she grew in years, then we never heard it after that. But when we came to this country to Ellis Island there were a lot of Irish people, and all nationalities I'll say. And we, of course, we were hoarded just like cattle in Ellis Island into these cubicles that were like, they were fenced in rooms. They were fenced in almost with chicken wire I will say. And everybody was hoarded in this room. And when we got in the room, you know, they, people there, with, now my mother was, she was not an educated person as such, but they owned, her people owned a farm. And so they, I would say they were, she was a middle class lady. And when these people come in with their babushkas, you know, well, see, we never saw that in Wales or England. And they dressed differently, you know. We were dressed like the Americans, I guess. (she laughs) I would, English people, I guess that's what you'd say, because the America wasn't that old at that time. But she did say in a, when we were in Ellis Island, she said, "Oh,

the shanty Irish." And that was the years, she said her aunts, because she was raised by an aunt. She said her aunt would always say, if she was talking about an Irish person, "Oh, the shanty Irish." Because they figured that, the dirty Irish, I guess that, they, that particular thing, because when we would go to the table, we would have big tables at Ellis Island, and they would put the, a bowl of hard boiled eggs in the center of the table, in the morning for breakfast, perhaps. And they would, everybody would, they let you out for breakfast, and it was time for the day. They let you out for the day. But at night you used to have to go in there. They used to have cots and things you had to sleep on. But anyway if you didn't get to the breakfast table quick enough, why, you wouldn't get anything, or you'd only get what what was left, because they'd have these big bowl of eggs on the table, and some would take two or three. But by the time it got to you, you were lucky if you could get one, you see. But you got to learn that after you'd been there a few days. Because a lot of people were not on Ellis Island anymore that one day, or even a few hours. But because we were there a week we got to know the Ir, we got to know it pretty good, you see. (she laughs) And my mother was wishing that

they'd send her back. Because, you see, they kept my brother because he had a flat nose. They took him into the hospital, what they called then, not, they didn't call it a hospital. Forget the name of it now.

But anyway he had to go with my dad, because all the men and women were separated in Ellis Island. So the women went one way and men went the other. And my brother being only three years old, why he went with my father. And when my father came back, and my mother said, "Where's Glyn," he said they took him to the infirmary, that was the word, infirmary. "They took him to the infirmary." Well, my mother almost lost her mind because she didn't know what happened, you know. "Well, when are they going to bring him back?" And every day she'd ask, but they, she never got any answers. Just that they were looking into things, because he this, he had an impediment in his speech. Even though he was only three years old, he could speak, but he, other people couldn't understand him. But we could understand him. And he was born with, without any bone in his nose, which would really, the bridge, he had no bridge in his nose, so his nose was flat, you see, at the top. But he had nostrils, and his mouth, pallet, was not, did not go through. So it was really a completely, pallet that

had a hole in it, you know. But anyway, he said, so finally, at the end of the week after many examinations, and we hadn't, we never saw him, and my, he, my mother or father never saw him during that week, because they weren't allowed to go to see him. But we were all, the first time when we got there we were stripped. My mother and my sister and I, the first time in our lives we ever saw another lady, another person that was na, we had to strip to our waist. (she laughs) And they went through your hair for fleas or whatever they were looking for. And gave you a thorough examination. And this was everybody. You know all types of people. And then it wasn't like an individual examination. But then eventually you did get an in, individual examination. And after everybody was cleared, evidently they decided, I don't know how or why, but they, when my mother went the last day of the week, they told her that she could pick my brother up and they would release us. Now in the meantime my aunt, who lived in Philadelphia, which was my mother's twin sister. She had come to meet us to pick us up, because she was the one who was sponsoring us. She was guaranteeing that we would never be any, would I say not go on any welfare or anything with the country, that she would volunteer,

that she would take care of us. So when she came and found that we were going to be detained a week, she evidently kept asking and finding out. I don't know how we got, but the end of the week, we, I never heard the story or how or why, because my mother was so glad to get off there. So when she went to pick him up, my brother was quite happy. He was sitting between a Chinaman and another Asian person. My mother said she thought he was Japanese. Older people, I mean, they were men, because he was with all the men. And he was sitting between them, and he was quite happy, she said.

**END OF SIDE ONE**

**BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO**

WILLIAMS: After a week I guess he got to know them and he was familiar. And so then that day, the same day that she brought him out, why, then my aunt was there to meet us, and she took us to Philadelphia. Germantown, Philadelphia. Where her husband was employed on the railroad. But...

LEVINE: Do you remember that journey from Ellis Island?

WILLIAMS: No, I don't.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

WILLIAMS: We did go by train, I'm sure. We must have gone somewhere to pick up the train, but we did go by train to Philadelphia. I do remember it was by train, but I, but anything else I don't remember about that. Just, I remember getting to her house, you know. She lived on, in Germantown. She lived right opposite a chocolate factory. And she had a, a house which was an attached house, too, but I don't, they didn't own the house. She rented it. And her husband worked, as I said, in the railroad, but he was an alcoholic. So he would work so many weeks and then he'd be off. But my mother and my sis, my mother and my aunt were identical twins. And she, they had one daughter whose name was Ismay. I-S-M-A-Y. And she was nine months older than my sister. So my brother who was three years old, he was really spoiled between the three girls and the parents, you know. But my sister and I being as young as we were, well, not that young,

really, nine and ten. And my aunt would come downstairs in the morning for, and, for breakfast, we thought it was my mother. We would call her my mom, because they were identical. You would never know the difference, really. And I don't know, it was a couple of years before we ever realized, even when they did get older and she came to visit us, even then it was hard to tell the difference. But then my father wasn't, Philadelphia there was, he had been a miner all his life. My father mined coal in south Wales.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about his work as a miner in Wales?

WILLIAMS: Well, yes I remember he, I don't, when I say I remember, I remember him telling us. He went to work in the mines, I think when he was either ten. He was either ten or twelve, but I think it was ten. Because my husband went to work in Wales in the mines when he was twelve. And, of course, my father was many years older, so, I'm sure he was ten. He was one of a family of nine, I think there were nine in the family. And they, he had three sisters and I'll say five brothers. He was one of twins, too, by the way. My father was also a twin. But he was not an identical

twin. He was the other type. I forget what the name is now, but, they were not...

LEVINE: Fraternal.

WILLIAMS: ...yes, that's, but they were not identical. But anyway, when he worked in the mines, he went down, right in the, of course, they say the mining in England and Wales was not as strenuous, or not as dangerous, perhaps I'll put it that way, as it was in the United States, at that time. But he used to carry his pail and, it's what they used to call a tommy-box. And they used to have a, he used to have a metal, I remember this, they used to have a metal box, metal container I'd say, of water or tea, if you put the, and they used to pull it around their neck with a, they used to carry their bucket. But, I mean, this container they used to put around their neck so that then they'd have their hands free, I guess. And he, I knew the mine that he, he would point out the mine that he was working in. But then, you see, that's why we left the United, the, that's why we left south Wales, because the, my father was out of work perhaps, before we, they closed the mine. They didn't close the mine down, but they laid off so many people, you

know, and things. And so then my father opened a business before we left Wales. And he was in the arcade in Abertillery. And I'm sure, I went to the, I know where it was. I mean, I've seen it, I can see it now. But it was in, and they called it the arcade, because it was like we have today like these little shopping malls. But this was a small one. And it was covered over, you see. And inside that arcade there were different stores. And my father had a, I'll say it was a vegetable. And we used to call it green grocers store. And he would sell to the people there, and, and those, then, because we were young, we were only three youngsters, my mother, if he had to work in the mines, if he was called to work, he would, my mother would take care of the store. But we had a cousin who lived in another valley, who was my first cousin, and she was an older person. She was I'd say sixteen or seventeen. My mother had her come, and with us while, this was before they came to the United States now, while they had their business, because they were waiting now, you see, to be told, you know, when the quota would be up. But in the meantime she came to the Uni, she came and stayed with us, while my mother was, and she lived with us, just like a live-in maid, you see. But my mother probably paid her. But

even if she didn't she had her room and board, and she wasn't working or couldn't get work, so that helped her family out, because that was one less to feed, and she had a good home to live. And my brother then, he was three when we came to this country. Now I don't know how old, because my brother, my mother hasn't too long been dead. She lived to be ninety-six, and I never asked her all the questions that I should have asked her, which I didn't. But anyway, my brother, we were eating in the middle room, I'm sure it was in the middle room, yes. We had the high chair there. My brother was in the high chair, and my sister and I must have been, no, maybe we were in school. Now my sister might tell you more about this. You might ask her about this, because she might remember more. As I remember my mother telling me, my cousin whose name was Beryl, B-E-R-Y-L, Beryl, she was taking care of us. And while we were in school, my brother was in the high chair, and he was getting his breakfast. My brother fell out of the high chair and hit his head against the grate, which was the fireplace, you see. And it was, there was fire in, there was fire in there. So she came back into the room, and then of course she had to call the doctor. I don't know what happened after that. But my brother had a, I don't

which side it was on, but anyway, he had a, no hair, no hair ever grew there again, because it was white, you know. And it was the whole, just the whole side of his head. But you couldn't, you couldn't see it, because, you see, enough hair grew down over that. Nobody else could see it, but I mean, we knew. And when he was little, you know, you could see it, because, then they used to wear a bonnet or, you know, wear something on his head. But then, so he must have been maybe only two when that happened, you see, because he wasn't, they didn't, they didn't ask us anything about that on Ellis Island. Now, whether never saw it, because he was only three and he had a hat on, you know, a cap on, and he was, but they examined him well. But I never heard anybody say anything about that particular thing with him. It was only his, the bridge of his nose, you know.

LEVINE: Was that a concern of the family that that might be a...

WILLIAMS: Oh, I think, well, no, I don't think so. Because I never heard anybody, in fact, I never remembered my mother mentioning that until, if we might have asked it when we got older, well, where did Glyn get this on

his head, and she might have told us then, you see. That's, but that was how it happened. And it was during the time that this, and I, and this lady is still living, by the way, in Wales. I should someday maybe write and ask her, you know. Because her sister wrote me not too long ago. I had never heard from her, this sister. And she told me that her sis, sister Beryl is still living. And she said that she's much better than I am. And she said she's going on ninety. I'm sure that's what she said. She'll be ninety soon, but she said she's in excellent health. And she said, so would you please keep in touch with me. And I, and I am going to try to, and I think that I will ask her that question next...

LEVINE: It'd be a good question.

WILLIAMS: ...time I write, if she remembers that, and if she could tell me how old my brother was when this did happen, you know, that. But in the meantime that was very sad experience for my mother, you know. Because to have something like that happen. And he was really spoiled because I think of his affliction, because of his not able to speak clearly, you know. And other people couldn't understand him, even our neighbors.

But they could understand some things he would say. But us, being with him all the time we got to understanding practically everything. And if we he'd get real mad, you know. But if we didn't understand that he was saying, because there was no way that he could tell us then, you know. But he couldn't have anything done for that till he reached sixteen.

LEVINE: Well, his name was Glyn. Your sister's...

WILLIAMS: G-L-Y-N.

LEVINE: And your sister's name is Enid.

WILLIAMS: E-N-I-D.

LEVINE: And your father's name?

WILLIAMS: David John.

LEVINE: And your mother?

WILLIAMS: Griffiths. David John Griffiths.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

WILLIAMS: My mother's name was Maud. M-A-U-D. No E on the end of it. Just M-A-U-D. And no middle name.

LEVINE: Did she, do you remember her maiden name?

WILLIAMS: Yes. Evans. E-V-A-N-S.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

WILLIAMS: Evans.

LEVINE: And, let's see. Was, did you have grandparents nearby?

WILLIAMS: We had, my, my mother's mother and father died when my mother's mother was just thirty-six, I think. So, had no grandparents on my mother's side. But my father had grand, had parents. And they lived within, I don't know how many miles, a few miles. Anyway they lived in a town called B-L-A-I-N-A, Blaina or Blayna (pronounces first syllable as a long 'a'), some people say. And that was the next, next to the next town to us. It was the, not the very next town, but the town after that. And we used to walk to my grandparents

house every Sunday after church. We would go there for dinner, Sunday dinner. Or we would go home for dinner, and after dinner we would walk to their house and have tea, what we would call, at five o'clock, you know. And for tea we just had, (she pauses) maybe bread and butter and jam, and a dessert, always a dessert, and high tea. Because we'd had our big dinner, you know, earlier in the day. But that was a routine every Sunday. We, as long as I was, as I can remember, when we were able to walk, the three of, with the three of us, and my mom and dad, they, we would walk up to their, their. And my mother, my grandparents had a lovely home in Blaina, and my grandparents were deacons in their church.

LEVINE: What church was that?

WILLIAMS: I don't remember the name of the church. But I know, I remember seeing the church and being in the church. But I don't remember the name of the church. But anyway, they had a lot of, like I say, they had nine children I'll say. But I don't know of any of their children, except my, well I'd say, two of the ladies, two of the aunts, they kept up their, their faith, you know. But none of the boys, I don't, I don't ever

went to church after they were married. They had to go to church when they were home. And they read the, their father, and they read the Bible every night. And my grand, my grandmother died before we left England. Because my sister remembers a little bit about her funeral. Now, I don't because I was eighteen months younger than she was, so I don't remember so much of that. I don't even know how old I was when my grandmother died.

LEVINE: What denomination were you?

WILLIAMS: I, I just don't remember. I, we, my mother, my mother and my sister, not my father, my mother and we three children went to the Methodist church called the M.E. I guess it was Methodist Episcopal. And that's where we were going, and we were members, and we went to Sunday school there until we came to this country. But my father never went, after that, I don't think my father ever went after he was married perhaps. But my mother always kept up her religion. Now, what she was before she married my father, I, I don't know either. My mother, my sister might know that, too. See, my, my mother and father always lived on their own. Independent. We lived with them, very close by all

our lives, both of us, until my father died. And my father died in 1965. He had a stroke. But up until that time he was very good. And my brother lived, he never married, and my brother lived in with my mother after my father died. I should say my mother lived with my brother, because my brother bought the home, and then my mother and father lived there. And when my father died my mother continued to live with him up till a certain point. And then we, we were coming to Florida, so we asked her would she like to come and live with us. And she said, yes, she thought she would. So she ga, he sold the house then. And he went into a place on his own, you know. And then she came with us to Florida. And we only arrived here in Florida three, we got here on Thursday. We drove from New Jersey to Florida on Thursday. And on Saturday we got a telephone call from my sister to say that they had found my brother, and he had been, he had found, been found in his room. Anyway he had died, and they said he died of a heart attack. But he'd been dead a few days, because he might have been dead, because he was supposed to come and see us the night before left to come to Florida for dinner at my sister's house. And he never came. And that was unusual for him. And we tried to get him. But they said there was no

answer. So, of course, we just didn't think any more about it. But he was only fifty. My brother was fifty years old then.

LEVINE: Well, we're getting a little short on time now.

WILLIAMS: Right.

LEVINE: So let's say, when you first came to this country, do you remember any things about it that struck you as different from any, from what you had been used to up until that point?

WILLIAMS: No. No. In fact, the neighborhood that we came to was in the heart of Germantown, Philadelphia. So to, to me it wasn't near as nice a neighborhood as what we moved from, you see. And when we went to Pennsylvania, we went from there, and my father found a job. Because people that came over on the same ship that we came, we came on the S.S. America, went to Pennsylvania to the mining town. And my father got in, we got in touch with them. And they said come here because there's plenty of work. So my father went there. And when we got there we had to find a place to live. So we found a three room apartment.

And it had no electricity. And it didn't have any gas lamps either. I don't think, we had ele, we had oil lamps. Now where we were in England, where, from our house, we had gas lights all through the house. So we had to put money in the meter so the lights would go on. But, I mean, we never had oil lamps, you know, or anything like that. But then eventually that town, they did then get electricity into the, into the town. And then, we, so were there for, oh, quite a while, I guess. My father got work, and...

LEVINE: What did he do in Philadelphia?

WILLIAMS: He didn't work in Philadelphia. He went, he went all, out from Philadelphia. We were there only six months in Philadelphia.

LEVINE: Oh, I see.

WILLIAMS: And he, within that six months he went out to Ohio, see if he can get work in Powhatan, Ohio. And he did get work there, but he wrote my mother and told her, you wouldn't like it out here, because there was nothing there, you know. It was just a real old mining town, I guess. So then she said, well, you

write to the people in Pennsylvania, and they said there's plenty of work there. So that what he did. And he went then to Pennsylvania from Ohio. And he wrote my mother and told her to come on and bring the children and that's what we did.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Where in Pennsylvania?

WILLIAMS: Well, the town we went to first where we got the three rooms was Sheatown. S-H-E-A-T-O-W-N. Sheatown, Pennsylvania. But we only stayed there maybe a year or, because these three rooms were kind of cramped, and all our friends lived in Nanticoke. N-A-N-T-I-C-O-K-E. Nanticoke, Pennsylvania. And that was really a nice town. A very nice town. And so my father got work. And after a, I'll say a year and a half, maybe two years at the most we moved to Nanticoke, Pennsylvania. Although I went to school in Sheatown. So we must have been there a year or so, you see. And that was when my sister was upgraded to the next grade, if she was in Sheatown. But then when we went to Nanticoke, then we went to the Nanticoke schools. And that was a town, they had paved streets, they had nice schools. They had everything, really. Very much like the town we came from in England. Very similar

to that, you know.

LEVINE: And were, were there coal mines? Is that what...

WILLIAMS: Oh, yes. Coal mines. Yes. My father worked in the coal mines in the Bliss, B-L-I-S-S. And then of course, well, he worked there all the time that, till then I went to business school in, in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. And my sister, no I went to a diff, I didn't go to business school. My sister, I went to the, in Kingston they had a college, but it was a business college, really. Wyoming Seminary, that's, that was the words. I went to Wyoming Seminary in Kingston, and my sister went to Wilkes-Barre Business College. Because my father said, he told me, if I wanted to wait and see whether he could afford to send me to college at the end of four years, that would be up to me. But I was only a sophomore now. And he said, (???), you want to go now to business, so I figured, well, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. So I went to business school. And then when I graduated from Wyoming Seminary, then, then we had the Depression. And they had the WPA, and I worked in WPA for a couple of years in the courthouse taking down things that was necessary, you know.

LEVINE: What kind of, what kind of things (???) the WPA?

WILLIAMS: Well, you know the dee, deeds, you know, where you have to get the deeds to people's property. You know, now a lot of people lost their property at the time, I think. And we, I had to copy the, for lawyers, I guess it would be for them. Copy the, what would they call it, yeah, the deed description of the property, you know. From, you know, they say you start at this point, and then fifty feet from there you go to another point, and you know, that kind of thing. And I did that for quite a few months, you know. And it was, it was more or less a tedious job, but it was something that you got paid for, which you couldn't get, couldn't get work anywhere, anywhere else, you see. So I was very fortunate in that respect.

LEVINE: Now this was like people who couldn't afford to keep up their mortgage payments, or losing their property? Was that what it was?

WILLIAMS: Well, I would, oh yes, yes, yes. That was in the 1929's and 1932, too, you see. That was when, now I got married in 1934. But I was only nineteen when I

got married. But, I mean, it was during those years between 1929 and 1934, or I'll say '32, because actually after I graduated from the school I got this WPA job. And I don't know how. I got that just applying, I guess, you know, to, and having had business experience. Perhaps that was the reason. But I had to travel to Wilkes-Barre from Nanticoke to the courthouse itself, you see. And we lived there until we moved to New Jersey. And that was 1934.

LEVINE: How did you meet your husband?

WILLIAMS: In Nanticoke. Because this was a town where they had a lot of Welsh people. Like I told you, that's why my father went there. Because there were a lot of people that, and of course, everyone, just like here, everyone would recommend their own. So it was mostly Polish people and Welsh people. Majority, I'd say. It was like half and half. And when the mines went out, why, they, they were bad times, because they had unions, and they were fighting the unions. They, my father used to go to work and they wouldn't let him work, you know, because the, I don't know, scabs, whatever they call them, so. But that where I met my husband. We went to church. And we used to have a

group of people, and my mother and father's friends. Their friends had children. And so they would meet together, and they would have parties, and meet on Sat, excuse me, Saturday nights and play cards and things like that. And so therefore I was sixteen when I met my husband. And we went together about three years, I guess. And it was through the, our own Welsh group, that really, how come I met my husband, and my sister, too. And my sister's husband and my husband were first cousins. (she coughs) So in other words, their mo, my sister's husband's mother and my husband's father was brother and sister.

LEVINE: I see. And they, had they also come from Wales?

WILLIAMS: No. No. They, my sister's husband's mother came from Wales the same year that my husband came. My husband didn't come from Wales until he was, 1928. And he was then twenty-three. (she coughs) Because he's eight years older than I am.

LEVINE: And he didn't come through Ellis Island?

WILLIAMS: No. Because, I think 1923 was the last year, or the, or the next to the last year that Ellis, that they had

people coming into Ellis Island. I think maybe they had people in 1924, but that would be the last year, you know.

LEVINE: So, let's see. When you think back about starting out in Wales and, and coming to this country, and spending the better part of your life here, do you think that had an impact on who you were in the world? I mean...

WILLIAMS: Now I think it does. I don't think it did then, because I was too young. But now it does. I often look back. I have a son now. (she coughs) Who's going to be fifty this year, and our daughter's forty-two. Forty-four, rather. And I, I think myself, you know, now, my son, I don't think my son and his wife and their two children would pick up and go to another country. I mean, really, I don't. Which my father did, and he was forty-two, which three children, and had a good home. I mean, really. And...

LEVINE: How do you think about you, what your father did...

WILLIAMS: Well, I, I appreciate now more than ever. I really do. I appreciate my parents now more than I ever did. Because I really think that what they gave us, a lot

of children don't get today. Because there's no, the family life is not the same, you see. And that what makes, that's what makes, and even now in, back there I don't think it probably is the same. But we go back. And we've been back many a times, because we have nieces, you know, that my husband's brother has three girls. And one of the girls was born in Nanticoke at the time, because his brother came with him. And strange that you should ask that, because my sister's son was here just now for, this past week, and just went back. And he asks questions, because he was in the service in this country. And he asks questions sometimes. (she laughs) And he said, he never knew, he said, "I never knew that Brynn was, came with you, Uncle Jim." And he said, "Well, how come he went back?" You know. And Jim said, "Well, there was no work here, you know, at that time." In 1935 this was, it was right after the Depression. And there were, there was work back there, and some, a lot of people did that, you know. And he said, "Well, why would he go back there," he said. You know. I mean, well, Jim said, "It was a lot better back there than it was here, then." But you see he wouldn't realize that. He's only thinking of this country the way it is today, you see, and that makes a lot of difference.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, what, when you say the family life that your mother and father gave you, what...

WILLIAMS: Well, we ate our...

LEVINE: What was...

WILLIAMS: We ate our meals together. And my mother never worked. I mean, not until the war, in this country. When this country went to war then my mother went to work just to help the war effort. Let's put it that way. Not that she had to work. And my mother saved, not that I ever do, but my mother used to say, you must save, like out of what ever portion you earn, you should save at least ten percent. And we always went to church together. The family. Not my dad, because my dad stayed home, but, by, by working in the mines he got up at five o'clock in the morning. And when he got home at three o'clock in the afternoon or whatever, she'd have, we, he had the dinner ready. My mother always had the dinner on the table by five thirty or six o'clock. And then we all ate together. And then if we had to go to church, or whatever, we had to go movies, or whatever, well, my sister and I

just left, lead a normal life. But we had to be in by ten o'clock, even when we were going steady with somebody we had to be home by ten. And if we weren't they'd want to know the reason why, you know. So...

LEVINE: Let me, before the tapes runs out, just tell me your husband's name and your children's names.

WILLIAMS: My husband's name is James Williams. He has no middle name. My son's name is Richard Lee Williams. And my daughter now is Judith Williams Muir. M-U-I-R. Because she's married and she has no children. But my son has two children, so I have two grandchildren. One named Carrie Jean Williams, and my grandson, who's named Brian James Williams.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I'm, the tape is about run out...

WILLIAMS: That's fine.

LEVINE: ...but I just want to thank you very, very much. It's been a pleasure.

WILLIAMS: Okay, you probably, you know, won't, because I'm writing a, I've started my history on the...

LEVINE: Wonderful.

WILLIAMS: I really have. I've just begun it. And I'm, hopefully I'm going to go till the end of my, my life, or almost to the end of my life, let's put it that way. (she laughs) And put it down so that my children can,...

LEVINE: And maybe you...

WILLIAMS: and grandchildren can read it, you know, and...

LEVINE: Wonderful. And maybe you can let Ellis Island have a copy in some future time. (they laugh)

WILLIAMS: Yeah. Well, I don't know that Ellis Island would be interested really.

LEVINE: I think...

WILLIAMS: But I mean, I think that, I want to, not on the...  
(tape ends)

EI-285/MARY JANE WILLIAMS

**END OF INTERVIEW**