

EI- 356  
EDWARD STACK  
BIRTHDATE: FEBRUARY 18, 1920  
INTERVIEW DATE: 7/23/1993  
RUNNING TIME: 59:30  
INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.  
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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: JOHN MURIELLO, 9/1995  
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

CANADA, 1924

AGE: 8

RESIDENCES:

? IRELAND: LISTOWEL, COUNTY KERRY  
??CANADA: WINDSOR, ONTARIO  
? US: DETROIT, MI;

HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mr. Stack was born in Ireland. When he was four, he moved to Canada then at eight to the US. In 1937, he stowed away on a ship to Germany and after being detained and returned was then held at Ellis Island from December, '37 until February of 1938.

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, July 23, 1993. I am at the Ellis Island Recording Studio with Edward Stack. Mr. Stack was born in Ireland. When he was four he moved to Ontario, Canada. From Ontario he moved to Detroit when he was roughly eight years old, and from there to New York. In 1937 he went to Germany and came back to this country in late December of that same year, December of 1937, and was held at Ellis Island until February of 1938. Anyway, Mr. Stack, welcome.

STACK: Thank you.

SIGRIST: Let's begin by you giving me your birth date, please.

STACK: February 18th, 1920.

SIGRIST: And is Edward Stack your full name?

STACK: Edward James Stack.

SIGRIST: Edward James Stack. Tell me, where in Ireland where you born?

STACK: Listowel, County Kerry.

SIGRIST: Can you spell the name of the town, please?

STACK: L-I-S-T-O-W-E-L.

SIGRIST: And, can you tell me a little bit of your family background?

STACK: Well, my father's father had a business in Listowel called E.J. Stacks. It was a drapery plus other items that he sold. My father was in the First World War with the British army. When he came back he married my mother, and they opened up a wine and spirit shop in the same town, Listowel, and decided because of the troubles and amount of hostility, my mother felt that it probably would be best if we left the country.

SIGRIST: Do you have any personal recollections of Ireland?

STACK: Yes. I remember the Black and Tans which was demobilized British soldiers that were pressed into service as kind of paramilitary police. They used to drive through the town half drunk and shoot up the square. And we lived on the square. And my mother used to put mattresses on the window to stop the bullets. And I remember crying out to her, "Shots, mama, shots." The subsequent incursions of the Black and Tans and the Irish rebels broke into our place once, looking for a gun. The British Black and Tans found a revolver which my mother used as a horse pistol. My father, grandfather on my mother's side was a horse trader. Anyway it got very serious because at that time holding a gun was almost a death penalty. But my mother put the bullets in the mattress where I was sleeping. So they only found the unloaded revolver. And that ended that. Anyway it convinced my mother it was time to get out of the country.

SIGRIST: What was your dad's name?

STACK: Edward J. Stack, the same.

SIGRIST: And, what, he was from this town? You said his family was from there?

STACK: Yes, yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: And what was your mother's name?

STACK: Lilian Behan. B-E-H-A-N.

SIGRIST: And was she also from this town?

STACK: From Listowel, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you just tell me a little bit about what your mother's personality was like?

STACK: Well, a characteristic of Irish women is that they're no nonsense when they get married. And she was quite a disciplinarian in the house. And apparently called the shots because for one thing my father liked his little drink. And that also made her nervous, and

thought going to a new country, gettin' from away from her -- his cronies, he might settle down.

SIGRIST: And, just give me a thumbnail sketch of your father's personality, too, please.

STACK: My father personality was enjoyed by many people for two reasons. One, he had a very warm and winning smile, and two, he had a, what many thought was a magnificent Irish tenor voice. And whenever he was visiting he was always asked to sing a song, which he did.

SIGRIST: And you mentioned that you had grandparents in Ireland also who were living when you were a child.

STACK: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you have any first hand recollections of them?

STACK: Well, my grandmother, that is, my father's father's wife, was a very kind and winning woman. And one time I left our shop, I must have been about three. And my first effort of adventure running away, I suppose. I went up there to see her, and she and my uncles made a big thing out of it, and gave me a huge copper penny, which subsequently I spent at Cotters which is a store across the street from us, popularly known as the candy shop.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the house at all that you were born in and grew up in?

STACK: Yes. It was a slate roof house, one of the first in the town. It was three floors. The top floor was where I and my brothers stayed with a nurse. The second floor was the family rooms, the public rooms, and the bottom floor was a shop.

SIGRIST: And you said this was right on the square in town.

STACK: Right on the square in Listowel.

SIGRIST: So your mother decides that this is not a good atmosphere to live in.

STACK: Well to be fair you must remember it was after the war, and there was a great deal of trouble in Ireland, both with the British and both among the Irish themselves. So it became as far as she was concerned inhospitable for that reason as well as my father drinking with his cronies, and talking rather belligerently about events she thought that he might get involved in, she'd wind up being a widow.

SIGRIST: Why was Canada chosen?

STACK: Well, it's a member of the Commonwealth, and it was simple to leave Ireland and go there without any problem at all.

SIGRIST: Did your father want to go?

STACK: Well, I don't think so. But it wasn't his decision. It was my mother's decision.

SIGRIST: Now, were you an only child, or did have brothers and sisters at that time.

STACK: No. No. I had a brother, Regie, who's living in this country now. Fourteen months younger than I. When we came to Canada my sister Virginia was born, and we went to Detroit, and my brother never was born, and my younger sister, Zenda, was born.

SIGRIST: What was your younger sister's name?

STACK: Z-E-N-D-A.

SIGRIST: Zenda.

STACK: Zenda.

SIGRIST: Well, that's an interesting name. Do you have any first hand recollections of the immigration experience from Ireland to Canada?

STACK: Very little, except that when we got off the boat the big thing was your luggage. It's spread all over the place, and you wait for customs, which we did. Everyone was very nice. And the immigration men, I remember, made a big thing out the little Irish children, meaning myself and my brother. And, I won't forget this, one of the put it in his hand and pulled out some sweets, and gave me one. I thought that was very nice. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Now when you travelled by liner to Canada, did you go to New York and then travel up, or did you go right directly to...

STACK: Directly to Montreal.

SIGRIST: ...to Montreal. Well, that's interesting. Tell me a little bit about life in Ontario. You lived there for about four years you said.

STACK: It was, I went to school there. And it was very nice. It was a Catholic school, rather strict. It was very pleasant, and because I brought over a little Irish accent, they enjoyed having me read to the class. And that experience made the years in Ontario very pleasant.

SIGRIST: And the name of the town was?

STACK: Windsor.

SIGRIST: Windsor. Right.

STACK: W-I-N-D-S-O-R.

SIGRIST: Was there a large Irish population in this town?

STACK: There was a fair amount, yes. Not a large, but a fair amount. And the Irish that came over had a tendency to congregate together, especially if they were from the same district or same county.

SIGRIST: Did, why, why did your parents choose Windsor? Why that town?

STACK: Well, one thing, it was opposite Detroit. And my father thought working in the States was economically better than working in Canada. And he had it in his mind, as well as my mother, of immigrating to the United States within a reasonable length of time.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the boat that you took to Canada?

STACK: I thought it, it was a White Star line. I think it, the Berengaria, is, comes to my mind, but I don't actually remember, but I do remember the White Star line.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your parents' relationship once you got to, to Ontario. Did moving actually accomplish what your mother had hoped it would accomplish with your father.

STACK: Not an iota. Except that he wasn't into the rebellion group. But he did liked his drink, and did continue to sing, and did make merry with his friends (he laughs), which they enjoyed as well as he.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the house that you lived in in Windsor?

STACK: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe...

STACK: And I remember the address. 264 Josephine Avenue.

SIGRIST: Hmm.

STACK: It was a house that they bought, and lived there. Next door was another Irish, Breens, who had a team of horses. Like nowadays you'd have a tractor to go out and do some construction work on development. He had a team, and he'd take them out. And I used to go in and watch the horses, and it was very nice.

SIGRIST: You said one of your sisters was born there.

STACK: Yes.

SIGRIST: Virginia?

STACK: Virginia, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollection of your mother being pregnant or giving birth, any of that experience?

STACK: Yes. It was rather frightful because of a lot of hollering and bellowing (he laughs). And after it was over and the baby was born, that's Virginia, everything was peaches and cream (he laughs).

SIGRIST: Now were you a religious family at all?

STACK: My mother was very religious. I, myself, was raised a Catholic, and by the nuns and later on by the Jesuits. They gave you no mercy (he laughs).

SIGRIST: Do you have recollections of, of being punished by the nuns in...

STACK: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: ...in Windsor? What do remember about that?

STACK: Mostly a ruler on the knuckles, and the priest, eraser or a piece of chalk while they're up thinking that your attention wasn't total.

SIGRIST: Did your parents have a choice as to which school to send you, or the, the parochial the only school in the town?

STACK: No, there was others, but as long as it was parochial they liked it.

SIGRIST: Now, you were in Windsor for four years, and then tell me what happens. How do you end up moving to Detroit?

STACK: My father worked with the Ford Motor Company. And he got to be quite popular with the company and with the superintendent of his department. So rather than make the trip everyday, and they wanted to come, they decided that they would just move over. So they applied for legal entry and they got it. And...

SIGRIST: Had your father gotten the job with Ford right from the beginning?

STACK: No, we were in Canada, in Ontario, at least a year before he worked. And finally the money was running out, so he had to take a job as a steeple jack. And he came home from that and my mother was horrified (he laughs) with the look of him and the fact that she would be a widow, so she said you had better look into something else. So he went to, across the ferry, in those days you had a ferry, and got a job at Fords.

SIGRIST: And that's how he would have gone to work everyday, is on the ferry.

STACK: Yes. So that, among other things, decided them to move to Detroit.

SIGRIST: Well, and as you say it had always been their intention to come to the U.S. anyway.

STACK: Yes. Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollection of the moving to Detroit?

STACK: Yes. By the time that I was eight we had collected quite a bit of furniture and stuff. So it had to be loaded on the truck, and then on the ferry, and then from the ferry to Meldrum Avenue where we lived, and then loaded there. So it's -- it was quite a sojourn as well as a complicated piece of work.

SIGRIST: Now, once you got to Detroit did your mother get a job outside of the home?

STACK: No. No.

SIGRIST: Never.

STACK: Never.

SIGRIST: So how long did you stay in Detroit?

STACK: Till, till I came back from Ellis Island, if you'd like to say. I went to the local high school and finished. And then on my own I got a job in Ann Arbor, which is University of Michigan, and was able to put myself through for a few years. And then when the war came. I came back to New York and joined at 39 Whitehall Street.

SIGRIST: And in what division did you join?

STACK: The air force.

SIGRIST: The air force.

STACK: And...

SIGRIST: How did your parents feel about that?

STACK: Well, my father wasn't -- died in '36. But my mother felt well, if that's what he wants, that's what he wants.

SIGRIST: So your parents were living in Detroit when your dad died.

STACK: Yes.

SIGRIST: What did he die of?

STACK: Apparently, he got a pension from the British government for war wounds. And apparently something happened that over the years developed into a -- some kind of internal disorder that he died at forty-one.

SIGRIST: I see. And this is 1936 you said.

STACK: Yes.

SIGRIST: Was that the first time you had ever gone to New York when you went to enlist?

STACK: No. I first went to New York when I went to Germany.

SIGRIST: But, oh, I see. Well, you went from Detroit to...

STACK: Ann Arbor.

SIGRIST: ...to Ann Arbor.

STACK: Yes.

SIGRIST: And then you were in school for a while.

STACK: Right. Till, till beginning of '42. And then I left there because the war was on, and, and I decided to come to New York and enlist at here, in New York City.

SIGRIST: I see. Well tell me how you ended up in Germany in '37.

STACK: Well, in, I always wanted to go back to Ireland. And I thought, well, the only way I can go is just jump in a boat and try to slip off the boat when I got to Southampton, and go to Ireland. The plan was destroyed by being caught on the Hansa and taken to the captain, Captain Lehmann. And his only comment was that I was a goddamn fool, (he laughs) which come to think of it, I probably was.

SIGRIST: That was a rather adventurous thing to do. Were you inclined to doing things like that when you were a young man? Impulsive...

STACK: I'm afraid so. In any event, the, leaving here, I got a job at the Western Union, and used the uniform and a blank envelope as a -- to get on board ship. Said I had to deliver it, and when I got on board I hid under a life boat. And when the ship got maybe a hour out to sea I climbed, a double deck life boat, I climbed from the one life boat to the top, but I couldn't move the tarp back. And the tarp was slightly ajar on the bottom one. So, and it's November. My hands were ice, frozen almost. So I said, "Well, looks like I'm going in the water." So I dropped on the bottom gunwale deck and forced myself to do a summersault, and landed in the bottom of the boat. And then I just relaxed and slept. And in the morning, it must have been about nine o'clock, a sailor saw me and hollered out the word, Anschlagler [einschleicher?] which means someone stealing passage without paying (he laughs). And from then on I was in their custody, so to speak (he laughs).

SIGRIST: Well, how did they treat you while you were...

STACK: They treated me very well. The first officer took me to the galley where there was a young boy by the name of Hans Beck, who was in charge of cleaning the pots and pans. And we became friends. And just about gave me the run of the ship until we got into port. Then they would lock me in the hospital. The young boy, Hans Beck, took me to his room and he showed me the photographs on the wall. And instead of pin-up girls they were Goering, Hitler, Goebbels, the one, Hess, which we both agreed that we thought was the better of the lot with the exception of Hitler, of course. And when we got into Hamburg, we went; we stopped - the tender come at Southampton and at Cherbourg -- and then went up to the Elbe River to Hamburg.

And they took me ashore then, and put in a kind of a what they used to call a 'Black Maria'. And I was the only one in it. Then we stopped, and it picked up about a dozen women from age maybe fifteen or sixteen to maybe forty. When they saw me, they were a bit nonplussed. And I was terrified. I didn't know what the hell was going on (he laughs). At any rate, after a few minutes the driver - they started to snicker and laugh, which is even more terrifying. A few minutes later they stopped and let 'em off, and then took me to a Stadthaus. And during the course of the questioning they put me in a place where there was a number of people waiting. And I slipped out and moved around the town.

Unfortunately I couldn't speak, had no German money, and looked, if anybody, bakery put any breads or milk that I could get something to eat. A few days later, I met some young men or boys like myself, who were talking about the Hitler Youth Movement. And being Irish they felt that I wouldn't have any trouble because the German were kind of partial to the Irish. And I was, all right, let me go and check. At least I have a place to sleep and place to eat. I stayed less that a week. There were all kinds of interrogation and part of it was the difficulty of understanding what I was trying to say, mostly lies, I'm afraid. The, then they found, or I let it out that I come over in the Hansa from the United States, and the next thing you know I was in the Hansa to come back here.

SIGRIST: Did your family have any idea of where you were and what you were doing?

STACK: I wrote them from New York saying that I was going to get a job on a ship. And that was about it. So they felt that, probably got a job on a ship. But when I got into Ellis Island, I phoned, not phoned, I sent a letter to an aunt that I had in Brookline, Massachusetts. She got in touch with my mother, and then they found out the whole story (he laughs).

SIGRIST: When you were in Germany do you have any recollection of how you felt? I mean, was this a frightening time for you...

STACK: Oh, no. No.

SIGRIST: ...or was this just a great adventure for you?

STACK: It was an adventure, no question about it. But the thing that impressed me at that time about the Germans, one, the cleanliness. Everywhere was clean and orderly. And also their friendliness. I thought I was very well treated. And this is at the time you began to hear some things in Germany. Nothing as you did later on. But I found, and those that I talked to, one had a, lived in New York, and brought his mother over, and was telling what a great place because it was a time of reasonable pro -- prosperity in Germany. And the powers that be that time had changed the Germany of the twenties, which was a disaster to a reasonable prosperous time and to some a powerful time. So the people and the country and everyone, except some of those in authority, was kindly. Some, I got pushed around a couple of times because I didn't respond deferentially. I wouldn't stand up and say, "Heil, Hitler," for which I got a box in the face for.

SIGRIST: Was this once you were, were being taken in by the Hitler Youth Movement?

STACK: Yes. That, and later when I, before I went back to the Hansa, I was kept in another Stadthaus where they had a German Jew as a prisoner, who was the editor of a Hamburg paper. And they had a kind of a guillotine then. And he was I think beheaded. In the yard they had a box that you'd look out the window. And it had steel venetian blinds that was kept open. And the day they took him in there they closed it. And of all things he was singing "It's a Long Road to Tipperary." Because he liked the Irish. And one of the guards allowed him to speak with me because he could speak English. And he also gave me a book, Salisbury's Lives of English Poets, which is a great gift if you have nothing to read (he laughs). At any event, that was probably the most frightening aspect of the time I was in Germany.

SIGRIST: We need to pause just for a second so Kevin can flip the tapes over, and then we'll keep going.

STACK: Sure. Sure.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Mr. Stack, how long were you actually in Germany?

STACK: About a month.

SIGRIST: Oh, so it was a good chunk of time that you were actually there.

STACK: Yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: Where did you stay, when you say you stayed in the Stadthaus', I mean, what, what were the accommodations like in these places.

STACK: The room or cell that they put me was a bed made out of wood that had incline upward for your head. I was put in there maybe two or three nights. After that I got a proper bed.

SIGRIST: Did you ever regret doing what you had done when you were in this situation?

STACK: Not at all. Not at all. There was nothing to regret, really. It was a, an experience that I was a little bit prepared for by the newspaper items that came out at that time, and the fact that in Germany there was enormous amount of uniformed men in various color uniforms. Everything seemed to be going in a precise manner without the bloodthirstiness of war. It seemed like a -- toy soldiers in a way. Everything was done in a very precise and orderly manner, and the people, while not exactly gentle, were certainly kindly.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about bring, being brought back to the Hansa, and where did you stay on the boat for the return trip?

STACK: Well, coming back to the Hansa, I met some of the same -- in fact almost all the same, and they treated me like an old friend (he laughs). And this time I got a more comfortable room to stay in. But again when we got into Southampton or other ports I would have to go into the hospital where they lock me in. But all in all, the treatment that I received, considering that I was a stowaway, was surprisingly good and kind.

SIGRIST: On the return trip were you expected to do ship duties of some sort?

STACK: No. If I wanted to help I was, no, I was not expected to do anything.

SIGRIST: Do you know how long the return trip was?

STACK: Seven, seven days, I think. About seven days, yes.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me what happens when you get to New York Harbor.

STACK: When I got to New York Harbor there was a call from the ship to the police department to say that they had a stowaway on board, and he seems to be Irish, Irish born, and I don't know what you want to do with him. This is according to what I heard from the ship. Anyway the police department sent a policeman down. He took me to the ferry and brought me over here. On the ferry he was nice and friendly but it was just a job. And it was pleasant. When I got over here, went in that same front door but it was not quite as fancy or as built up. I was processed and it must have been about eleven o'clock this time.

And then I went up to, they showed me where the dining room was. I went in, and that was the time when I saw those fascinating murals on the wall. I sat down. The waiters were colored with a white jacket on, and there were men and women at the table all around there. I particularly remember a very attractive woman across from me with a

rather sullen face which later I understood was a German baroness that was a refugee. She might have been Jewish, or whatever, but anyway she, she was there. Another fellow that I met was a Dutch, no, a Scotsman, who was a butler to the Vanderbilts, and apparently was in foul with the Immigration. Another fellow there, which was quite the opposite, was a Dominican who told me that hot dogs were known in New York City as pimp steaks (he laughs). Anyway, the time in Ellis Island was like in a huge YMCA. People were friendly, and we played soccer out on the little veranda out here with a screen mesh out there. I don't know if it's still there.

SIGRIST: Out behind the building.

STACK: Yeah. Attached to the building, but it was enclosed with wire screening, heavy wire screening. And we'd go out there and play soccer.

SIGRIST: So there was no snow on the ground. Then even though you were here in...

STACK: No.

SIGRIST: When did you arrive, you said December...

STACK: About seventeenth or eighteenth of December.

SIGRIST: And so you would, you would be how old at that time, you would be seventeen, right?

STACK: Seventeen. I wasn't eighteen until I left here.

SIGRIST: Tell me where you slept on Ellis Island.

STACK: First night they put me in the, what they called a family room then. It was rather large, but there was no one else in there. And later they gave me a single room which -- they didn't lock the door. They locked the door on the family room when I, but later they didn't, so that you could get up and move around. At that time they had quite a number of Chinese here because of the Manchurian thing. And in their, their area, they were kept together, were quite a number of double decked cots. And they all in there, I got to speak to, a couple of them then -- spoke English. And all of them seemed happy and content because the food here was not bad at all. And the guards acted more like attendants. And instead of a prison, it was kind of a keep. But not unpleasant. That aspect of Ellis Island proved to be pleasant. The thought of Ellis Island at first sounded like a, an Alcatraz. But it wasn't at all.

SIGRIST: You mentioned you celebrated Christmas here. What do remember about that?

STACK: Well, the, they had turkey dinner, and I believe they had ham, as well. A lot of stuffings and goodies and apples and bananas -- candies. It was quite a feast and everyone seemed to enjoy it. They did enjoy it.

SIGRIST: Did they have a Christmas tree set up somewhere, or...

STACK: That I don't remember.

SIGRIST: ...don't remember. Tell me some more about some of the other people that were here. For instance, do you remember any of the Chinese specifically and maybe their individual stories or something like that.

STACK: Well, one young Chinese, who apparently come from a family that had some money, because he had a, quite a good education. And he spoke English, a little difficult, but with patience you could understand what he was saying. And his major problem in understanding his country was the Japanese brutality and the installing of a puppet -- king or emperor, emperor actually -- in Manchuria, that Manchuria was really nothing but a Japanese province. And I'll never forget what he told me. He said you can tell the difference between a Chinese and a Japanese. I said, "How?" He says, "Shake a Chinaman's hand and shake a Japanese hand, and you'll find a different touch. The Chinese is softer and more cultured and Japanese is rougher and tense." I never forgot that. That's fifty-six years ago (he laughs). In fact I just remember it now, for a long time I hadn't thought of that. Anyway...

SIGRIST: And you said the Chinese were all kept...

STACK: Together, yes.

SIGRIST: ...by themselves.

STACK: Yes. Not really segregated because they could move as we could move. But more or less for their own comfort and the communication.

SIGRIST: Well now you were here for almost two months. I mean, it was a big chunk of time. You mentioned playing soccer. What else was there to do while you were here?

STACK: There was reading. They had books all over the place. Constant socializing, and everyone telling tales, and many of it was interesting. Of course, it was an interesting time. '37 was beginning to be a precursor of a great drama in Europe, that some people were conscious that things were not going to get better, but worse. And the most interesting people that I spoke to were of course English speaking because of the communication problem, but apart from that, this young China-- Chinese man which I liked to chat with because he gave me an insight into what was going with Japan and Manchuria and China. The English speaking people spoke of the class system in Britain, and one told me that you could post somebody for a sixpence.

You go and take him to the post office, spend a sixpence and a postman would take him to the address that you would send him, which I found out later was actually so. The, the major interest in the time that I spent here at Ellis Island was the association with the different nationalities. By that I mean the Scots, the English, the

Irish, the Australians, the New Zealanders, I believe there was one or two New Zealanders here at the time. And those Europeans, the French that spoke English. The aspect of that that interested me greatly, being a young man, was the varied views that exist throughout the world, and not just the one that you here in this country. And it may not have given you tolerance, but it certainly gave you a little more understanding than you did have.

SIGRIST: Did you have any opportunity to be exposed to the medical facilities here?

STACK: Yes, very briefly. Somebody had a heart problem or some kind of a internal problem, and I believe it was on the other side over here. I'm not sure. But I think I went over there once to visit with them. Somebody was kind enough to take me over there. Some one of the attendants or guards. And I was impressed by its cleanliness, hospital like cleanliness. And the general good will and courtesy, if that isn't too strong, of everyone that worked here. The, I couldn't help but compare it with the Germans that I met in the Stadthaus that were more severe, more strict and less kindly disposed. It was a, this was not as I viewed it a prison, but a keep, a place of detention, but in a very civilized manner.

SIGRIST: Now you had to undergo no medical exams yourselves while you were here?

STACK: I don't recall any. No.

SIGRIST: Do you...

STACK: Although, wait a minute. Come to think of it, I think that up here on one of these of galleries, did they have medical help up here then?

SIGRIST: It may have been, sure.

STACK: I think that I had to go and get a cursory-- cursory examination. Yes I, when I come up here I saw that gallery there and it reminded of a long time ago.

SIGRIST: Now, did you have clothes with you, or what did you do for clothes? (he laughs)

STACK: I had this Western Union uniform that I wore all the time. And in Germany one of the young men in the youth movement wanted to know who Woo was (he laughs), what country was that, because you know you had a little WU for Western Union. Anyway, someplace along the line, I think it was here that I got some clothes that were more civilian than Western Union. And then when I got out, of course aunt got me clothes.

SIGRIST: Did you have any visitors while you were here?

STACK: None. None.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what happened to get you off of Ellis Island.

STACK: Well that, there was a tribunal here at that time. Three judges. Everyone that was on here I assume, at least it happened to me, you went before the tribunal and they had to decide whether to deport you, allow you in the country, or decide one way or the other exactly what to do with you. I went before them, and I told them that my family, though born in Ireland, though we were Irish, we're in Detroit. And they asked me at that time some topographical questions about Detroit to make sure that I was telling something that was believable. And that was the end of that. They didn't decide one way or the other or let me know at that time what they did, but a month later I was allowed to go.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me where the tribunal was, what the room looked like?

STACK: The room was I'd say -- at least twenty foot wide, and maybe forty foot long. The judges, or tribunal, sat on a raised dais with three chairs and a long desk. You went before them, stood before them, and they asked you question. You didn't have a lawyer or anyone there, except one of the attendants or guards, whatever you want to call them, and maybe one or two other in what I assume was a court room. And you went through a series of questions for them to determine just what to do with you.

SIGRIST: Did you have to wait in a waiting room or something before your turn, or...

STACK: No. No.

SIGRIST: ...they just simple brought you.

STACK: As I recall they just told me to go there, and I waited for a few minutes outside in a little anteroom and was, and was ushered in.

SIGRIST: Did you see anything while you were on Ellis Island that you had never seen before, maybe amongst the detainees here, something that sticks out in your mind as having been very odd or unusual or...

STACK: Well, the, the most striking thing was the conglomeration of nationalities. And that, that stuck out. From black to white, from Caribbean to European, Asian. The thing that really and to this day stick with me was the enormous flux of nationalities and how well they all seemed to get on. And the unobtrusiveness of the guards or the attendants, whatever one would call them.

SIGRIST: Would you say that most people who were detained here at the time or the people at least that you spoke to were also sort of in a situation of really not knowing what was going on like yourself, not being told what was going on?

STACK: Yes. To some extent, they discussed their particular situation very lightly and not in much detail. But many that I spoke to

knew precisely what was going to happen. The Scotsman knew he was going to go back to Scotland, the Dominican knew he was going back to, uh, Dominican Republic. The Chinese didn't quite know what's going to happen to them because there was a certain sympathy for the Chinese refugees at that time. The Germans that were almost escapees from Germany felt, and I don't know this for a fact, but felt that the U.S. was going to be a little lenient on allowing them to come into the country.

SIGRIST: I see.

STACK: These are the main things that stuck out.

SIGRIST: Well, in our last few remaining minutes let's get you off of Ellis Island.

STACK: All right.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about how that happened and where you went once you got off.

STACK: Well after they dismissed me, I went to Boston -- Brookline, Massachusetts, where my aunt was and visit with her for a short while, and then went back to Detroit.

SIGRIST: Now this aunt is your father's sister, your mother's sister?

STACK: It was an adopted child that was put in my mother's house. So she was raised like a sister from Australia. So she really wasn't a blood relative, but very close.

SIGRIST: Now you said once you had gotten to Ellis Island there had, you did phone your mother or send her a letter. She knew you were being held at Ellis Island.

STACK: Yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: Was there any communication while you were held here other than that one time? I mean did she write back to you?

STACK: She wrote to my aunt, Aunt Myra in New York, and told her to write me and get in touch, and that if she could come into New York and visit with me, or as soon as I get out for me to go there.

SIGRIST: Aunt Myra is the woman in Boston.

STACK: Yes. Yes. So that really was the - the end of the adventure.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about released from Ellis Island?

STACK: Oh, a bit nonplussed because I felt that there was no doubt that I was legally in America, and that with all their know-how they would find that out, and that I eventually would be released. So I - I wasn't surprised. Except when I went back to Detroit, went back to

finish high school, I wrote a piece on the adventure without saying that I was a part of the adventure. And I'll never forget the English teacher in the senior year said, "You know, fiction is one thing, fantasy is another. Save your fantasies for elsewhere." (he laughs) Either I didn't write it very well or it was too far fetched.

SIGRIST: What about, what about your mom when you, when you told her, if you told her what you had been through in the proceeding few months? What was her reaction to all of this?

STACK: She'd probably go to mass communion the next morning and thank God that he's home safe. But mother's go through this sort of thing.

SIGRIST: I mean, it is an incredible adventure, you know, what you had gone through, and, and you were very lucky on several turns of that adventure.

STACK: Actually I never saw any luck to it as much as I saw that there was a humanity abroad, that like a guardian angel, it would take care of you. So I really never felt fear or threatened, except that case with that editor of the paper in Hamburg. I heard that he was executed but I don't know it for a fact, and subsequently I can more believe it than not. But that, that was very distressing.

SIGRIST: Did you...

STACK: 'Cause I didn't see any reason for it. Well, he said the only reason was that he married a German girl and had a child by her. It seemed to me a poor excuse for an execution (he laughs).

SIGRIST: Did you ever make it to Ireland to visit...

STACK: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: ...in your life? You finally got there.

STACK: Yeah. Oh, yes, yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: How long did it take you to get there? How old were you when you finally visited?

STACK: Believe it or not, '65. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: So it took a long time.

STACK: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, that's quite a story, I must say.

STACK: Well, thank you.

SIGRIST: Looking back on it, what was your, what was your favorite part of the whole adventure? What was the part that you enjoyed the most of that, of that whole, that whole thing?

STACK: Believe it or not, it was in the city streets of Hamburg -- everything seemed so right in the world without really knowing what was afoot. But people were reasonably content, I thought very human, a bit severe, a bit over-disciplined, but clean and orderly. The parks, I can see them now going through the parks, the students with their books under their arm, and perambulators being pushed. It just seemed such an orderly universe. Unfortunately there was aspects of it that I had no knowledge of, that were tragic.

SIGRIST: It was the beginning of the end at that time, certainly.

STACK: Yes.

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Stack, I want to thank you very much. This has certainly been a unique opportunity...

STACK: Thank you (he laughs).

SIGRIST: ...and your details of Ellis Island were just wonderful, and I want to thank you very much for taking some time out and coming to talk to us.

STACK: Thank you.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Edward Stack on July 23, 1993, on Friday afternoon at the Ellis Island recording studio.  
EI-356/STACK