

EI-419

MYRTLE SEFTON BERLINGHOFF

BIRTH DATE: DECEMBER 2, 1913

INTERVIEW DATE: DECEMBER 12, 1993

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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ENGLAND, 1920

RESIDENCE: WEYMOUTH

AGE 7

US RESIDENCE: BROOKLYN, NY

PASSAGE ON "THE AQUITANIA"

PORT OF EMBARKATION: SOUTHAMPTON

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today in Oceanside, Long Island, New York, with Myrtle Berlinghoff, who came from England in 1920 when she was seven years old. Today is December 13, 1993, and I want to say that I'm very happy that I have a chance to talk with you, and I'm looking forward to hearing your story, especially about Ellis Island. Okay. Um, let's start at the beginning. If you'd give your birth date, and the name you were given when you were born.

BERLINGHOFF: Okay. December 2, 1913, and I was born in Weymouth, Sussex. (disturbance to the

microphone)

LEVINE: Okay.

BERLINGHOFF: Okay. I was born in Weymouth, England.

LEVINE: And did you live in Weymouth until you came to the United States?

BERLINGHOFF: No. I lived there about five years? Five years. And then we went to Scotland. We lived in Scotland for a year, and then we came back to Weymouth.

LEVINE: What do you remember about Weymouth?

BERLINGHOFF: What do I remember?

LEVINE: Do you remember the town?

BERLINGHOFF: Yeah.

LEVINE: What was it like? What are your remembrances from being a little girl there?

BERLINGHOFF: Well, uh, we lived right across the street from what they call the torpedo works, which is like a, like Grumman [ph] would be here, I guess. And, uh, we lived right, a mile from Portland, which is

Portland Bill where they had the invasion, they took off for the invasion of Normandy. And, I don't remember, you know, we were just, it was just ordinary where we were kids and that.

LEVINE: You didn't go to school in Weymouth then?

BERLINGHOFF: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Oh, you did.

BERLINGHOFF: Oh, yeah, I went to school. I went to school when I was three years old.

LEVINE: Oh, how come?

BERLINGHOFF: Well, they used to start the kids at three. (she laughs) I mean, we were, they called it the babies class that we were in for a couple of years. It was only, there was only a couple of rooms in the school that I remember.

LEVINE: Well, was it a school with older children?

BERLINGHOFF: Uh-huh. Yes, it went all the way up to . . .

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, um, well, first tell me your mother's name and her maiden name.

BERLINGHOFF: My mother's name was Mercy, Mercy Jaundrell. Oh, I didn't give you my whole, my first, second name, did I?

LEVINE: Go ahead. Well, tell me, spell your mother's maiden name.

BERLINGHOFF: Her last name?

LEVINE: Yeah.

BERLINGHOFF: Mercy is . . .

LEVINE: Yeah, Mercy.

BERLINGHOFF: Jaundrell, J-A-U-N-D-R-E-L-L.

LEVINE: And your father's name?

BERLINGHOFF: Was William Sefton, S-E-F-T-O-N.

LEVINE: So you were born . . .

BERLINGHOFF: I was Sefton. (she laughs) Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. And did you have brothers and sisters?

BERLINGHOFF: I have one sister, two years older.

LEVINE: And what was her name?

BERLINGHOFF: Eva.

LEVINE: Eva. And, uh, so, um, what did your father do when he was in Weymouth, for work?

BERLINGHOFF: He worked in the torpedo works.

LEVINE: Oh, he worked in the . . .

BERLINGHOFF: He was an engineer, yeah.

LEVINE: And did your mother work?

BERLINGHOFF: No, no. Women didn't work that long ago. (she laughs)

LEVINE: And what did, uh, do you remember the house you lived in?

BERLINGHOFF: Yeah.

LEVINE: What can . . .

BERLINGHOFF: It was an attached house. There was a row of houses, a row of houses that was all attached.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And was there more than one floor?

BERLINGHOFF: Yes. It was upstairs and downstairs, and there was fireplaces, an open fireplace in every room.

LEVINE: And did you use those regularly?

BERLINGHOFF: Yeah, that was for heat. You know, it got cool at night.

LEVINE: You used wood, then, for heat?

BERLINGHOFF: I guess so. I don't remember. I mean, I never had anything to do with it. I was, I just kept away from it. Yeah. I guess that's what they used, though, or they might have used some coal. I guess they'd have to use coal to keep the place warm, wouldn't they? I never thought of that before.

LEVINE: Do you remember the kitchen?

BERLINGHOFF: Yeah. It was a great, big kitchen. And we had a coal stove in there. My mother cooked in that. And we had, well, it was a great, big room. It was a nice kitchen.

LEVINE: Your mother cooked on the coal stove?

BERLINGHOFF: Yeah. We had gas, though. Maybe she cooked on, I

don't know. (she laughs) I never even thought of it.

LEVINE: Um, do you remember, like what was a typical day like that you can think of when you were little?

BERLINGHOFF: Uh, well, I mean when we came home from school, of course, we had our own chores to do, even when we were young.

LEVINE: What chores did you have?

BERLINGHOFF: We, the dishes were ours. We had to dry dishes. My mother would always wash them, because we didn't wash them clean enough. But we had to do the dishes and, you know, help her clean up and that. And, uh, it was just, you know, but then, I mean, there was a lot of fields around there, open fields that we used to go play in. All the kids would get together, and we'd play all different things.

LEVINE: Do you remember games that you played?

BERLINGHOFF: No, I don't. I was just going to say, I don't remember that. I mean, when we were just playing around the house, like with my girlfriends and

that, we used to play house and, you know, the regular games kids play. But I don't remember what else we played.

LEVINE: Do you remember stories that you heard when you were little, favorite stories?

BERLINGHOFF: No.

LEVINE: How about religion? Was your family a religious family?

BERLINGHOFF: Uh, not very religious. I mean, we went to church every Sunday, you know, that was it.

LEVINE: What church did you go to?

BERLINGHOFF: Well, my grandfather was a Methodist minister, so we generally went to a Methodist church. Yeah.
(she laughs)

LEVINE: I see. Um, were your grandparents around?

BERLINGHOFF: No. My grandmother died when my mother was a little baby, but my grandfather lived in Shropshire, and that was up north from where we, we were down on the south coast, and he lived up north from us. My mother's sister lived in

Weymouth, too, where we were.

LEVINE: So did you see her much?

BERLINGHOFF: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: What was her name?

BERLINGHOFF: Florence Thompson [ph].

LEVINE: Do you remember any things that you did with her?

BERLINGHOFF: Well, she had three kids, three children. The oldest one was older than we were, but the other two were about our ages, so we were always with them, you know. We played a lot with them. We'd visit back and forth and it was, well, just like families are. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember any festive occasions in Weymouth, any particularly, uh . . .

BERLINGHOFF: No.

LEVINE: Big events that were celebrated?

BERLINGHOFF: Uh-uh, no. I don't think we did.

LEVINE: Well, how was it that you went to Scotland?

BERLINGHOFF: My dad went there to work. He worked up in the, uh, naval yard in Scapa Flow. So we went up to Scotland for a year. But it was, it was north Scotland, and it was, it got very cold there in the winter. And my mother said she just couldn't live there. (she laughs) It was too much.

LEVINE: What do you remember about Scotland that you . . .

BERLINGHOFF: Scotland we had a wonderful time. We lived on a farm. There was a farmhouse, it was in the shape of a T, like one, one of the sections was, two sections were apartment, and the house, the part that stretched out was where the owners lived with their kids. But we used to go bring the cows home and chase rats and wash our hair in the rail barrel that I thought my mother would die when we first did it. You know, my mother was quite proper, and anything like that. And most of the children there went to school without shoes. They walked barefoot to school. And we wanted to, but my mother wouldn't let us. That was absolutely out. (she laughs) And then they had sheep, and chickens. They had everything there. And we used

to just take care of everything. We just fit in with those kids. You know, the children that we lived there.

LEVINE: Can you remember any differences between the kids or the life in Scotland and life in England?

BERLINGHOFF: No. I know that the little boy there wanted to marry me. He always said he was going to be, I was going to be his wee wifey. (Dr. Levine laughs) I mean, he was a couple of years younger than I was. (she laughs) I thought he was, you know how you are when you're little.

LEVINE: So you, it sounds like you have fond memories of your time in Scotland.

BERLINGHOFF: Oh, yes, yeah. And (?), it was nice. It was very, I guess it was different to here.

LEVINE: Well, um, so how come you went back to England then?

BERLINGHOFF: Well, see, we didn't intend to come here at that time. And when we, well, because my mother couldn't stay in Scotland. She said it was just too much. So dad came back and went back to the

torpedo works. No, he didn't. We came back and we lived with another family, and that family, the husband was coming over here, so they talked it over, and my dad said, "Well, I'll go over with you." And my mother decided this is what she wanted.

LEVINE: To come to America.

BERLINGHOFF: Yes. So, uh, the two men came over I guess it was six months or more before we did, and then the two families came over afterwards when the men had gotten a place to live.

LEVINE: So do you, do you remember what you knew about America before you actually came?

BERLINGHOFF: I knew nothing, nothing.

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother packing up to come?

BERLINGHOFF: Oh, yes. I remember we had a big trunk, and she even bought her little, she had a little hand sewing machine, she brought that with her. (she laughs) But she had it very, very hard. Well, after my dad left, the ship he came over on, uh, smallpox broke out on it. So they had, he was

quarantined for about three weeks on Ellis Island.

And in the meantime they, what they, the Bank of England broke, what they say, went bankrupt, and they lost all their money. So it was very hard. They had had to work, you know, so much to get enough money to send to us to come over here, because all their money was in the bank and they couldn't get any. It was, it's not like it is today, if a bank closes you, you know, but then if the bank broke, that was the end of everything.

LEVINE: Did your father ever tell you anything about when he was quarantined on Ellis Island for those three weeks?

BERLINGHOFF: He never talked about it. All he said is they had a clean bed and food to eat, but he didn't say another, he never, he just didn't want to talk about it, because it was a very devastating experience for him, or for, you know, all of them, the whole ship was quarantined. So I guess they were kind of crowded. I don't know where they put them up.

LEVINE: So then he and the man he came over with, they,

did they settle in New York City at first?

BERLINGHOFF: Well, my father got a job in Brooklyn, I think. No. Was it Brooklyn? But he got a job, and he, there was a man that worked there, lived in Kearny. So he says, "Hey, we've got a room to rent. Come on and live with us." So that's how we got that. And, uh, then when we came over here we stayed there for, it was only a very, very short time, because there wasn't any room.

LEVINE: This is Kearny, New Jersey?

BERLINGHOFF: Yeah. And then from there we moved to Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Well, what was your father doing for work here?

BERLINGHOFF: I, the first, I guess it was the first job he got. He was an engineer in a printing press company. I think it was Hughes Printing Press. And he was out working on a job. He was always a mechanic. He was smart. And, uh, they went out on strike, and he didn't know anything about it until he was called and told they were on strike. So the strike lasted so long that Hughes just closed up. They never went back. So then he got a job with

Hydraulic Elevator, and he worked there until he went to California.

LEVINE: Well, he was able to work and send money, or send tickets for you and your mother?

BERLINGHOFF: I don't, I just don't know. I mean, you know, we never thought there was anything wrong. My mother just said she didn't, it was Christmas, and my mother said, "Well, I just don't have any money, but I'm gonna get you some bananas." That was our Christmas. Which was fine with us, we loved bananas. (she laughs)

LEVINE: This was when your father was in this country?

BERLINGHOFF: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you were still there.

BERLINGHOFF: Uh-huh, yeah. So I guess that's how she got the money to come over here. Dad worked and sent it. Because he just had a little room. He had a room and board, you know. So it was just transportation that he needed. Well, I guess, that's how he saved the money to send to us. But I, you know, they never said anything to us about

that. Like my sister says, "You know, we were poor when we were little." I said, "We were?" She says, "Yeah, but we never thought of being poor, because we, we had a very good home life." But, uh, well, what's the difference how much we had, you know.

LEVINE: So, um, so do you remember leaving? Do you remember leaving England to come to this country?

BERLINGHOFF: Yeah. We went from Weymouth, we had to go, we sailed from Southampton, and I don't remember, I guess we went on the train to Southampton. And I don't remember if we got on the ship right away, or we stayed overnight some. I think we stayed overnight, like a little hotel, and the next day we got on the ship to go to, come here.

LEVINE: And were you examined beforehand?

BERLINGHOFF: Oh, yeah, we had, we were vaccinated. That's what caused all the trouble on Ellis Island. We got, the doctor that did it said we had to have four vaccinations, so we each got four vaccinations. And he checked us out and that, so we all went, came here with a sore arm.

LEVINE: Okay. And the ship you came on?

BERLINGHOFF: Aquitania.

LEVINE: The Aquitania. Do you remember anything about the voyage?

BERLINGHOFF: Oh, yeah. We had such a good time. (she laughs)

LEVINE: That's good.

BERLINGHOFF: We, uh, we got, we got very friendly with the waiters on the ship, you know, the ones that served our meals and that. And, my sister and I. And they used to tell us to come down and see them, so we'd go down, and they'd jump rope with us and play with us. And when it came time that they had to start working, they'd let us help them set the table and do all that kind of stuff. And we really had a good time. (she laughs)

LEVINE: So were you, were you traveling third class or steerage, or were you in the first or second class? Do you know?

BERLINGHOFF: Third class.

LEVINE: So did you have a cabin?

BERLINGHOFF: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was it just your mother, your sister and you in the cabin?

BERLINGHOFF: Uh-huh, yeah. It was a little one. It was like bunk beds and another bed on the side. It was nice.

LEVINE: And so you went to a dining room?

BERLINGHOFF: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: For dinner?

BERLINGHOFF: Yes. It was, well, like the cruises, you know, you all go to the dining, and that's the way it was.

LEVINE: So you must have been excited coming over, were you?

BERLINGHOFF: Yeah. We had a wonderful time. My mother was sick. She got pneumonia on the boat, and they put her in the infirmary, and they told her not to worry about us, it would be taken care of, and we

were, yeah.

LEVINE: So is that why the waiters were sort of watching out for you, you think?

BERLINGHOFF: I don't know. No, they were friendly with us before she got sick. They were just very nice people.

LEVINE: So how long did it take you? Do you remember?

BERLINGHOFF: I think they say a week. It could be either five or seven days. I'm not sure which.

LEVINE: And, uh, do you remember coming into the New York Harbor?

BERLINGHOFF: Uh-huh. Oh, yes. We all went up on, out on deck to see the Statue of Liberty. We didn't quite understand what it was all about, but everybody was so thrilled about it, so.

LEVINE: And then, uh, you got onto a smaller boat, right, that brought you to Ellis Island?

BERLINGHOFF: No, I think the ship docked at Ellis Island, didn't it? Didn't the big ships dock there?

LEVINE: Usually they went to Battery Park, and then you got a smaller boat.

BERLINGHOFF: I know we got a small boat from Ellis Island to the, uh, mainland, to, you know. But I don't remember getting on a small boat to go to Ellis Island. We could have, but I just don't remember.

LEVINE: Well, um, what, uh, what were your first impressions of Ellis Island?

BERLINGHOFF: Very scary. (she laughs) Very.

LEVINE: What did you see?

BERLINGHOFF: There was just a mob of people all around you. You know, it was so crowded. It was terrible. And they just, you know, pushed you around as if you were dirt. It was, and then we had to be examined, and, uh, my sister had, her vaccination had oozed, like, and it had gotten stuck to her nightgown one morning, and we had to soak it, and so she had to stay in, stay there until it soaked off, and then the doctor or somebody gave her a piece of gauze to get over it so it wouldn't stick again, and that stuck to the thing. And when they

were examining us, the gauze was, you know, stuck on the vaccination. It was just one of her vaccinations. And the woman that was examining her, I don't know if it was a nurse or a doctor or what, but, uh, mother said, "We can't get that gauze off. It's all stuck." She said, "Oh, I'll take it off." And she ripped it right off her hand. And I think that was what made me hate Ellis Island, because she was so cruel, and anybody that hurt my sister was terrible. (she laughs) So, uh, and then after that they just kind of herded you together and pushed you through. (a telephone rings) Oh, excuse me.

LEVINE: Let me just . . . (break in tape) We're resuming again after a telephone call. Um, let's see, where were we. We were talking about Ellis Island, and, uh, your sister's, the nurse pulled the gauze off the vaccination. And so what else do you remember about Ellis Island?

BERLINGHOFF: They just, uh, I mean, they put you on, they sat you on benches. Then they called your name, and you had to, my mother had to go up and give them all the information or whatever it was. And they

got us all together, and they pushed us, practically pushed us out of the place, and they had a, you know, a little ship, a little boat there that we all got pushed on. And my dad must have come to Ellis Island to meet us, because he had brought peaches for us, and it's the first time we had ever tasted a peach, and they were so good. (they laugh) But, uh, that's about it. I mean, only the, everything you did you were like ganged up together and shoved, you know, "Come on, come on, we have no time to waste, get going." It wasn't a nice experience.

LEVINE: And there were lots of people?

BERLINGHOFF: Oh, yes, so many. And, of course, I never liked crowds. I never did when I was little, and I still don't like crowds. And I think that's one reason that I didn't, you know, I felt like it wasn't a nice place, because there were, it was so crowded, it was terrible. But, uh, I mean, they just, I mean, they treated you as if you were just below them, you know. Uh, I can't explain what I'm, as if you were nothing and they were everything. They were very superior to you

because you were just coming in. You were foreigners. But outside of that it was nothing, nothing very drastic.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember your first, the first few hours or days in the United States, any things that struck you as different here?

BERLINGHOFF: Well, I guess we went to Jersey on a subway. That was different. Because we only had trains in England. We didn't have any subways or anything. We must have gone on the subway someplace, because that I remember. And that was quite different to what we ever had. And, uh, I don't remember an awful lot about it after that.

LEVINE: So you were in Kearny then, at first?

BERLINGHOFF: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Did you go to school there?

BERLINGHOFF: Yeah.

LEVINE: And how about the school?

BERLINGHOFF: Very, very short while. It was all right. The kids all made fun of us because we talked funny.

You know, they all laughed at us, and they gave us a hard time because we talked funny. We didn't talk like them. And we had the real English accent, and we talked nice. (she laughs)

LEVINE: So were there other children from other, from Europe, do you recall?

BERLINGHOFF: Yes, yeah. We played with them on the boat. But I don't know where they went afterwards.

LEVINE: But in Kearny there weren't, in your school there weren't other children?

BERLINGHOFF: Oh, not that I remember. Because the other family that we came over with, the Whiteheads, they moved to I think it was New York. Their father had gotten them a place in New York.

LEVINE: So you were just briefly in Kearny. And then . . .

BERLINGHOFF: Yeah, in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: In Brooklyn.

BERLINGHOFF: And we weren't in Brooklyn too long either.

Because we had a, like, rented apartment. We didn't, I mean, we didn't have anything. Dad had to work and get some money so we could get places.

And from Brooklyn that, you know the brownstone houses, we lived up on the top floor, and we had two rooms, a bedroom and a living room and, like a day bed in the living room. And . . . (a bird can be heard chirping on the tape) The bird's worse now, isn't he? Um, what can I, I don't know what I can do with it.

LEVINE: We'll just let it go, and the tape will have bird sounds on it, that's all. (she laughs)

BERLINGHOFF: Yeah. We lived there for a while. I know when we moved in it was, you know, furnished, naturally. And I know that the mattress had bedbugs in it. And my father took it and threw it right out the window, he was so upset. He went out and bought a new mattress. He said, "We couldn't sleep in that." He said it was filled with bedbugs, which is an awful. (she laughs) And from there we moved to Jamaica. When we moved to Jamaica, we got to the end of the line, the elevator, and there was a big farm there. It seems so funny now

that when you look at Jamaica and think there was ever a farm at the end of the elevated. (she laughs) And we had a little, well, it was really a little store that my mother fixed up into a real cute apartment. It was a, like a little house. It was nice. And then from there we moved to another place in Jamaica. I mean, we've moved around a lot.

LEVINE: And why did you move so often?

BERLINGHOFF: My mother had, would get a place all fixed up, and it would be just lovely, and then she'd see a nicer, bigger apartment or something, and then we moved to it. And then we'd, uh, from Jamaica we moved down to, oh, I got to get my, there, there, oh, we moved to Cedar Manor. My, oh, my dad lost his job. I guess that's when the Hughes went out of business, and he was selling books. He was doing anything to make money, you know. And there was a man that just built a little house, and he wanted somebody to take care of it for him. He wanted a room there, but he wanted to rent the rest of it out, so Mother thought that would be nice, so we moved there, and it wasn't nice. He

was a, he was a drunk, we found out later. From there we moved to another apartment in Cedar Manor, and then we moved up further in Jamaica, and got a house.

LEVINE: Do you think your mother and father were glad they had come to America, or do you think they had some regrets about it?

BERLINGHOFF: Well, when my mother first came, she just wanted to go home, but, uh, she got over it. And I don't think she, they ever really regretted it. And . . .

LEVINE: Why did your mother feel that way in the beginning? Do you remember?

BERLINGHOFF: Well, she was sick. She had pneumonia, and she really hadn't gotten over it when we got here. And then the room, you know, how can I explain? In England everything was proper. But here, when we came here, there was a man, a woman and his daughter, the daughter and son, I think, lived in the house where we had the room. And the daughter called my father Bill. My mother thought that was just awful. It should be Mr. Sefton. And, uh,

she just was upset with the whole thing. And Dad gave her some flowers for her birthday. My mother thought that was awful. And, you know, everything just got on her nerves so at the time. Now, when you think back, you know, she wasn't feeling well and, well, it was just, but once we started to move away, then she seemed to be more, much more content. And when we moved to Cedar Manor, the second place in Cedar Manor, she went out to work. She worked in Bunny's Babyland. It was a little baby store. She used to love it there. So, and then we . . .

LEVINE: Where were you in school at that point, when you were at Cedar Manor, when your mother went to work in the baby store?

BERLINGHOFF: Hmm, I guess I was about in fifth or sixth grade. I have no idea how old I was. I guess, I don't know.

LEVINE: So what did you do? What did you and your sister do once you got here to America? What did you do for fun?

BERLINGHOFF: Played with all the other kids, whatever they, you

know, played. Cedar Manor we used to have a good time. We had a lot of kids there that were our own age, and we used to play all kinds of games, cops and robbers and baseball and, you know, all the kids' games. The kids don't play that way any more. You know, we used to play tag and hide n' go seek and all those kind of games, and you never see the children playing like that any more. They have to have Nintendos and all that stuff, I guess. Things have changed a lot since I was a kid.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. What do you think the biggest, if you could just, off the top of your head, the biggest changes that you've seen?

BERLINGHOFF: Hmm. I don't know. There's been a lot of changes, I guess. Well, I mean, when we were young, when we first got married, I mean, anything anybody wanted to give us, we'd take, because we couldn't afford to have everything. I mean, it was years before I had a washing machine. Today when the kids get married they have to have a washing machine, they have to have a drier, they have to have a dishwasher, they have to have

everything. I think that's the biggest change, because we, anything we could get we would make do with it, and now they don't. They've got a charge card. And the way they spend money, you'd think they didn't have to pay for it.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Tell me, so you continued in school, and then did you, what was your first job after you finished school?

BERLINGHOFF: I worked for Wanamakers in the city, I was a messenger. Then I got in the statistical department. I had taken it. I had, uh, finished school, and I took up comptometer. And I worked on that.

LEVINE: And so, uh, you were a comptometer operator.

BERLINGHOFF: Operator, yeah.

LEVINE: And then, um . . .

BERLINGHOFF: In the statistical. And then I did work in, then I went, we worked down in the controller's office

in Wanamacher's, and I worked there until I got married and had my first child.

LEVINE: How did you meet your husband?

BERLINGHOFF: On the Long Island Railroad. (she laughs) I used to meet a girl, we both went into New York with. And, uh, the one morning I got on there, and my husband was there, and she introduced me, and she said, "He's nice, but I don't like him." (she laughs) I said, "Okay." So then we started to go out, and we got, she wanted a date, so we got my husband's cousin to go out with us, and she found out that my husband could dance. He was a real good dancer. He's very big, very tall. And, uh, he could take you, if you didn't know how to dance, he could take you and hold you and lead you that you could, you could dance. When she found out that he was a dancer, she wanted him, but she didn't get him, I did. (they laugh)

LEVINE: What was his name?

BERLINGHOFF: Larry. Lorentz. L-O-R-E-N-T-Z. It's a Swedish name.

LEVINE: Oh. Was he from Sweden?

BERLINGHOFF: No, his grandmother was. Yeah, his grandmother.
He was born in The Bronx.

LEVINE: So did you, did you have a long courtship, or did
you get married soon after, or . . .

BERLINGHOFF: Uh, about a year and a couple of months we were
together when we got married. It's funny, because
we were going into the city, his mother and father
and he and I. We were going in to, I guess we
were going in to see the circus. His father
worked for the ASPCA. He was vice-president
there. And, um, he gets out a calendar, and he
says, "Well, when are we gonna get married?" I
said, "Huh?" And he says, "How about March?" I
said, "Okay." And he says, "Well, let's see,
March . . ." He says, "This week, the seventh we
couldn't." The eighth, I think it was, March 8th.
He says, "We can't, because there's something
going on in the fire department." He said, "We
have to go there first." So we got married, no,
the fifteenth there was something going on. He
said, "Let's get married the twenty-first." I

said, "Okay." So that's how we decided to get married. (she laughs) So we got married the twenty-first of March. But we always had to work around the fire department. He was a volunteer fireman. I married the fire department, believe me. (she laughs)

LEVINE: So that's what he did for volunteer work, and he was . . .

BERLINGHOFF: He worked in the city. He worked for Wolf's Head Oil. And, uh, he was a volunteer fireman. We have only volunteers out here, you know.

LEVINE: I see. So you were here then? You were living here?

BERLINGHOFF: Yeah. When we got married we moved in here.

LEVINE: To Oceanside.

BERLINGHOFF: I lived in Oceanside. We moved from Jamaica to Oceanside. And, uh, then I lived over on Windsor, Windsor Place. And when we got married we moved in here.

LEVINE: Oh, wow.

BERLINGHOFF: And I've been here ever since. I'm not like my mother. (she laughs) I think I stay put.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So then how many children did you have?

BERLINGHOFF: I have two.

LEVINE: And their names?

BERLINGHOFF: Wesley and Lorraine.

LEVINE: Does Lorraine have a married name?

BERLINGHOFF: Gibfried [ph].

LEVINE: And how about grandchildren?

BERLINGHOFF: I have six grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren. So I got, but they're all upstate. Two, two of my grandkids, Lorraine's two, are still down here, but one's moved upstate, and his kids are all up there.

LEVINE: Well, um, having come here as a young, as a child, and lived your life here, what, do you think that affected you in any way? Do you think that had an impact on the kind of person you are, or anything?

BERLINGHOFF: No, I don't think so. I think my parents are the

ones that did that.

LEVINE: What kinds of attitudes or values or, do you think your parents passed along to you?

BERLINGHOFF: Oh, to be honest. They were always very straightforward, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah, maybe you can just describe them. How would you describe your parents?

BERLINGHOFF: Let's see. How would I describe my parents?
(she laughs) They were little people, short. Mother, I guess my mother and I are the same height. Dad was about five-six, I guess, a little redhead. And, uh, my mother was very pretty when she was young. She was beautiful. And, uh, well, they were all very, always very honest, always. You know, they, you had to do the right thing, that's all there is to it. But, uh . . .

LEVINE: And your mother was always proper.

BERLINGHOFF: Oh, yeah. Yes. Well, Dad was kind of too, I guess. They got into religion later on. It was, you know, they, uh, they got very religious. But they didn't shove it onto everybody else like so

many people try. They were very nice about it.
But . . .

LEVINE: Did they get into the Methodist?

BERLINGHOFF: No, no. They went to, uh, the Windsor Avenue Church over here, which is Baptist, I think. Yeah. No, they didn't, well, we never did stick just to Methodist. I mean, when we were kids we went to the, in Jamaica we went to the Presbyterian Church. If our friends, when we moved someplace and our friends went to a certain church, that's the church we went to. It didn't matter. You know, we just went.

LEVINE: Do you think your mother and father had any customs that they had from England that they carried over to this country?

BERLINGHOFF: No. Not that I know of. I mean, it was just, I mean, it was just, if they had of, I wouldn't have realized it, I don't think, because we just lived with it.

LEVINE: Yeah. Did they become citizens?

BERLINGHOFF: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Was that something that was a big event, or . . .

BERLINGHOFF: Well, it was important to them, very important. And I became a citizen with my dad, because I was young enough. At that time, if you're under twenty-one, when your parents became citizens, you became citizens. But my sister wasn't. See, Eva's two years older than I was, and she had to get her own citizenship papers. And she went, she went for them, and they asked her if she had ever been out of the country, you know, for the last so many years, if she had visited other countries. She said, "The only place I've been is Mexico." So she couldn't get her papers. She had to wait a certain length of time, because Mexico was out of the country. And she said, "I didn't think anything of it," she said. And, uh, so they had to, she had to be deferred, and she had to wait a little while to get her papers then. (she laughs) She said, "I would have kept my mouth shut if I had known it." But that's the only thing. Yeah, they were very, it was very important to them to become citizens. Yeah.

LEVINE: What makes you feel proud about what you have done in your life?

BERLINGHOFF: I guess my kids. I mean, I got a couple of nice kids, you know. And my grandkids are great. That was my granddaughter that called before. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Do you, how about this time in your life, when you're retired? How is this phase?

BERLINGHOFF: This is great. I mean, I did work for a long time. I went back to work when the kids were about ten and thirteen, I think they were. I worked, you know, just down the street. And, uh, I, uh, I worked for Gulf Oil. My husband worked for Wolf's Head, and I worked for Gulf. And, uh, I just, uh, then from up here I went down to Oil City, but I was always in Oceanside, if they ever needed me. And they used to check with me every day after they got home from school, and thank goodness I did, because my husband died when he was fifty-three, fifty-seven, and I don't know what I would have done if I wasn't working. And now I'm enjoying life very much. I mean, I, uh, I bowl a

couple of times a week, and I go to senior's, and we go on trips and stuff like that. But it's, I have no complaints. (she laughs) Of course, I'd like to see my grandkids and kids more often, but it's quite a trip, it's not a long trip, it's just kind of, it takes two-and-a-half hours to get up there, so naturally you don't go up very often.

LEVINE: Do you drive?

BERLINGHOFF: Yeah, but my eyes are getting very bad. I have macular degeneration. So I don't know how much longer I can drive. That worries me, because if I can't be independent and drive, I, it's going to be terrible. I, uh, it bothers, that bothers me, to think I won't be able to drive. I wish they'd come out, they did do one experimental operation on it that seemed to have worked but, you know, the AMA is, has to approve everything, and that, so most likely it will be years before they approve the operation. I'm just hoping they do it fast, and I can get one.

LEVINE: Is there . . .

BERLINGHOFF: Of course, I am old. (she laughs) If I live

long . . .

LEVINE: You're not that old. (they laugh)

BERLINGHOFF: If I live long enough to get an operation, I'll be fine.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else that you'd like to say about England, your childhood, uh, coming here?

BERLINGHOFF: I think I said it all.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay, well, I want to thank you very much.

BERLINGHOFF: Oh, you're more than welcome.

LEVINE: It's very interesting.

BERLINGHOFF: I know I jabbered on a lot, but . . .

LEVINE: Well, now we have your story in your words, and that's, that's terrific.

BERLINGHOFF: Yeah, I wondered. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I've been talking with Myrtle Berlinghoff, and I'm here in Oceanside, New York. It's December 13, 1993, and this is Janet Levine

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for the National Park Service, signing off.