

EI-510

JOHN LYNN

BIRTH DATE: APRIL 16, 1928

INTERVIEW DATE: JULY 31, 1994

RUNNING TIME: 1:00:53

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 5/1996

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

IRELAND, 1951

AGE 24

SHIP: "THE GEORGIC"

PORT: SOUTHAMPTON

RESIDENCES:

- **IRELAND: CROSSMOLINA, COUNTY MAYO**
- **ENGLAND: LONDON**
- **CANADA: TORONTO**
- **US: QUEENS, NY; MINEOLA, L.I., NY**

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mr. Lynn is the husband of Eileen Lynn, Interview EI-509. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Oral Historian, 5/9/1996.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It's July 31, 1994. I'm in Mineola, Long Island, New York, with Mr. John Lynn, who came from County Mayo in Ireland in 1951 when he was twenty-four years old. Now, his story is one that I've never heard before, about coming to Ellis Island and being told that he couldn't come into the country.

LYNN: Right?

LEVINE: We'll get that whole story.

LYNN: We'll get it straightened out.

LEVINE: Yeah, good. Well, uh, okay. Let's start at the beginning. If you'd give your birth date and the town you were born in.

LYNN: I was born in Crossmolina, County Mayo, Ireland.

LEVINE: What was the first one you said?

LYNN: C-R-O-DOUBLE-S-M-O-L-I-N-A, County Mayo, Ireland.

LEVINE: And the date you were born?

LYNN: 4/16/28, 1928.

LEVINE: And did you live in County Mayo up until you left for the United States?

LYNN: No, I didn't.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. How long were you there?

LYNN: I was there until I was, uh, eighteen.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. So let's start out by talking about that period, up until you were eighteen years old.

LYNN: Oh, yeah, okay.

LEVINE: Now, what kind of a town was it that you lived in?

LYNN: It was a town, the population ---- actually, it was a village, but we called it a town, population seven hundred. Right?

LEVINE: What did people do?

LYNN: There were fourteen bars in the town for the seven hundred people.
[Laughs] Right? There were a lot of bars.

LEVINE: Yeah. What were people engaged in?

LYNN: They were mostly farming, farming.

LEVINE: Of what? What were they farming?

LYNN: Oh, wheat, oats, potatoes.

LEVINE: Livestock?

LYNN: Livestock, yeah, sheep, cattle, ride horses.

LEVINE: So, uh, so, uh, what was your father's name?

LYNN: Dennis Lynn.

LEVINE: Dennis? And your mother?

LYNN: Her maiden name, now?

LEVINE: Her first name and her maiden name.

LYNN: Uh, Bridget Dabitt, D-A-B-I-T-T. Bridget Dabitt.

LEVINE: And did you have sisters and brothers?

LYNN: Yes. I have one brother, and four sisters.

LEVINE: Oh. And where do you fall in the line? Can you say what their names are?

LYNN: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: In the line of oldest to youngest.

LYNN: My name is John. I have an older sister Mary. Then I have a sister Kathleen and a sister Anne, and a brother Dennis. How many is that? Just . . .

LEVINE: Well, you left out one sister.

LYNN: Oh, yes. She's in England. She's in London, yeah. Bridie, Bridget.

LEVINE: Bridget.

LYNN: Right?

LEVINE: So, uh . . .

LYNN: Yeah. I forgot about her, and I was talking to her yesterday in London.

LEVINE: Okay. Were you closest to any particular family member, would you say?

LYNN: No. I love my father and mother.

LEVINE: Oh, yeah. Tell me what they were like.

LYNN: Pardon?

LEVINE: Describe your father.

LYNN: A very quiet man, very, very, uh, very hardworking, worked hard all his life for, you know, to survive. It was very hard times when I was back there. And, uh, he worked, he worked in a sawmill. He didn't, in the sawmill, part-time, and out on the farm. And I went to work afterwards

LEVINE: With him?

LYNN: With him, yes, when I was thirteen.

LEVINE: So you worked in the sawmill, and then . . .

LYNN: Right? I worked in the sawmill, firing the engine that run the saws.

LEVINE: What was that like? You fired what, like . . .

LYNN: I fired, yeah; I fired the --- the --- the steam engine. Was steam engine run the saws. And I put the fire in to make the steam, and the water.

LEVINE: Was the fire made out of turf?

LYNN: No, wood. It was a sawmill, and we used the wood for the --- to fire the, fire the engine, to make steam, for the steam engine. They didn't have diesel at that time, I don't think.

LEVINE: What kind of wood were you sawing?

LYNN: Uh, actually it was mostly beech, beech wood. But you could use, well, some ash, ash and beech. We used to cut the bo --- cut the trees down, and then cut them into small boards and make egg boxes, just for, we made egg boxes. The sawmill turned out egg boxes for, uh, for, uh, oh, people who wanted to send the eggs overseas. They used to send them overseas, you know, buy them from the farmers, and put them into those egg boxes, wooden boxes.

LEVINE: So the egg boxes that were produced there . . .

LYNN: Right?

LEVINE: You could put a whole lot of, like a dozen cartons?

LYNN: Oh, yes, you could, easy, yeah. That was our job. I didn't make it. I was firing the engine. My father was cutting the wood.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So they actually sent the eggs overseas.

LYNN: Pardon?

LEVINE: They sent the eggs overseas.

LYNN: Oh, yes, they did, yeah, at that time. That's where the money come from. It was very, very, it was very ----- there was no money at that time, very much.

LEVINE: And how about your mother? What was she doing?

LYNN: Oh, she was nice. My mother, yes. She come from a Gaelic, Gaelic-speaking part.

LEVINE: Did she speak Gaelic?

LYNN: Yeah, fluently. [Laughs] When she come into town, she met my father. she couldn't speak any English. She spoke Gaelic. But she did learn English later on.

LEVINE: Did you ever learn to understand or speak?

LYNN: A little --- little bit, not -- not too much, because --- I could give you a book on it, there. It was banned, banned, banned from, uh, speaking Gaelic, because Ireland was under English rules for hundreds of years, and, uh, they couldn't teach English in the --- in the --- they couldn't teach Gaelic in the schools. It was banned. They tore the school down for teaching Gaelic. I have a book there.

LEVINE: So how did your mother come to learn it? I mean, how . . .

LYNN: Oh, she learned, she learned it from way back, from her people.

LEVINE: I see. So . . .

LYNN: They used to call them, I'll tell you how she learned. They used to call them hedge schools. Did you ever hear tell of hedge schools?

LEVINE: No, tell me.

LYNN: Well, those are schools that they used to ---- out ---- there was no roof or nothing, out by a hedge, you could call it a hedgerow, you know, and they learned there.

LEVINE: You mean, it was, like, outside?

LYNN: Outside, yes. But they, she got the Gaelic from her father and mother, and then it was handed down, you know.

LEVINE: Was she proud of it?

LYNN: Oh, she was, yeah. Yeah. Oh she was. But, uh, ----- you have to understand at that time, it was, you know, later on they rescinded that ban on the Gaelic. Now it's compulsory that you learn a little bit of it. But that time in the 1800's, it was, it was banned. I don't think it was banned for too long. They couldn't teach Irish. Maybe they were trying to make us all English. [Laughs] Well, they called them hedge schools, yeah, you know, out in the fields. Besides, you know what a hedge is, yeah. Well, them were the schools ---- of the hedge schools. I have a little history as well, my -- where my mother come from, there, in the book.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So where was she coming from? What part?

LYNN: She was from Mayo, too. But she come from Belmullet area. This was near Blacksod, right on the, it's the last land fall you see coming to the United

States.

LEVINE: So how, what, describe the school that you went to as a little boy. Did you go?

LYNN: Yes, until I was thirteen.

LEVINE: What was that like?

LYNN: It was all Right? It was --- it was hard. But it wasn't hard for us. You know who it was hard for? Well, when you're, you realize it now, that, uh, you know, you know --- we were poor people. And, uh, it was nice. Though it --- Now how would I --- how would I describe it? You'd have to ---- well, it was a national school, run by the government. Right up --- the teachers were paid by the government. And the teachers were pretty good. Very, very, uh, they were very strict, the teachers.

LEVINE: What would they be strict about?

LYNN: Well, if you're caught smoking, you --- you got --- you got it. They used corporal punishment that time.

LEVINE: The stick?

LYNN: Oh, yes. Yeah, sticks, bes--- well, I shouldn't be saying this, because this is on tape. But, ah, it doesn't matter now. It doesn't matter. But they were very strict. And they beat you into a --- senseless.

LEVINE: Really. Wow.

LYNN: Yeah. Because no, you couldn't complain to anyone. Who would you complain to?

LYNN: What would happen if the teacher hit you and you told your parents? What would be their response?

LYNN: Nothing. They couldn't do nothing about it. Hands across the head, arms, blisters here. And then you get a pain and let the water run.

LEVINE: So were you punished?

LYNN: Oh, yes, I was.

LEVINE: For smoking, or for other things?

LYNN: Oh, for smoking, too, yeah. Smoking, yes. Because, uh, you got nicotine on your hands, and we used to get it on there, they'd beat that nicotine off your hands with the stick. Very, very, uh, they were very strict. But when you think about it, that's the way they were at that time. Tat time, you know.

LEVINE: That was all you knew, really.

LYNN: That was all, yeah. Right?

LEVINE: Well, when you stopped at thirteen, right, why did you . . .

LYNN: Why did I stop? I had to go to work. I went to work in that sawmill. I had to fire the engine.

LEVINE: Did you feel, at that age, you were able to do the kind of hard work, I take it it

was hard work?

LYNN: Oh, it was hard work. You worked from nine until ten at night. And then you had to, we had to walk to work two miles, two miles-and-a-half, come home at night.

LEVINE: So was it, was it strenuous, it was very strenuous?

LYNN: Yes, it was.

LEVINE: For you at that age.

LYNN: Yes.

LEVINE: So, uh, did you have a kind of a camaraderie, or companionship with your father?

LYNN: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: From working with him?

LYNN: Oh, yeah. Yeah, Right? Oh yeah, I worked with my father. I was a, on the one end, and he was on the other end. There was more, there was other people working there, too. You know, there was about twenty men working in the mill. You know, they cut the wood, cut the trees, bring them in, and then they slice it down. Then it had to be cut into small boards, you know. There was a lot of people. And then the box had to be made, nails, nailed together.

LEVINE: It was like a little factory.

LYNN: It was like a little factory, yeah. You could call it that. It was on the big, it was on a big estate. He owned a lot of farmland, the man that owned it. Actually, he was, he was one of the old landlords from back in the 1700's. Because were --- they were given, uh, titles to those lands, and, uh, you worked for them. You worked for the landlord. Right? And, uh, sometimes they give you a piece of land to work on it, you know.

LEVINE: And then what? You give him some of what you grew?

LYNN: Right? That was it. Well, that's going back before my time, but this is how it started out. Like the man, man I worked for, his name was ---- he was Protestant, I was Catholic, all right?

LEVINE: Were there many Protestants around?

LYNN: No, not too many. But, uh, he was a good man. I never had anything against him. Just the way of the world at that time. You know, he called it a, my father went to work for him in, well, my father worked for him for forty years, all right?

LEVINE: Now, did your father farm a piece of land that you owned?

LYNN: No, no, he didn't. No, no. He worked in the mill. This was what the landlords used to do. They used to call it con-acre.

LEVINE: Corn . . .

LYNN: Con acre. Yeah, they'd give you an acre of land, and you would pay rent for that land, maybe a little house on it or something. This is way before my time, though. This is how it all started out, you know. But then they got

better, those landlords, you know, around modern times, I guess. If the '30s were modern, they weren't that modern, but they were . . .

LEVINE: More modern.

LYNN: Yeah, Right?

LEVINE: So, um, let's see. Uh, so you went to work at thirteen, and from thirteen to eighteen . . .

LYNN: I worked.

LEVINE: You worked with your father.

LYNN: Yes, I did, yeah, in the sawmill.

LEVINE: And what did you do for enjoyment?

LYNN: Oh, what did we do for enjoyment? Well, should I tell you?

LEVINE: Yeah, go ahead.

LYNN: Well, the far -- the farmers used to make -- make whiskey, illegal whiskey. Right? I lived in the town where I used to go out to work on this place. When the farmers take from one town to the -- bring it into town to go to the next town, they have to bring it through the town. Right? The whiskey. So when we were small we had guards there, you call them police here. Well, they were police, yeah, but we called them guards, garde.. And, uh, we, we'd beat them all the time. You know, we'd carry it over for the farmers. And the farmers would meet us on the other side of the river. Right?

LEVINE: You mean the guards thought that you were . . .

LYNN: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah, if they caught you.

LEVINE: What would they do if they caught you?

LYNN: Well, you were taken to court if you were caught. Kind of bootlegging in this country. Right? And, uh . . .

LEVINE: So you would, it would be as though you were delivering farm . . .

LYNN: Yeah, you delivered --- no, he wouldn't take it through the town because he'd be afraid to take it, but if we were small we'd take it to him. Right? And we knew where the guards would hang out and everything. Right? And, uh, we used to like that. You know, putting one over on the guards. Right? The guards were, ooh. They were not -- not like today. You can talk back to the police today. You couldn't talk back to them there.

LEVINE: So you did that. Did you ever get caught?

LYNN: No, I never got caught. My uncle used to make it. Yeah. I have a bottle downstairs, by the way.

LEVINE: Really?

LYNN : [Laughs]

LEVINE Now, what kind of, what kind of . . .

LYNN: It's called poitin.

LEVINE: Spell it?

LYNN: P-O-I-T-I-N.

LEVINE: P-O-I-T-I-N.

LYNN: Poin.

LEVINE: So, uh . . .

LYNN: You call it White Lightning here. Right?

LEVINE: You actually have a bottle of home brew?

LYNN: Oh I want to tell ----- Yeah. [Laughs] Yeah, it's downstairs. Well, it's half a bottle now.

LEVINE: [Laughs] So why was it that you . . .

LYNN: I forget I'm on tape --- some other ---

LEVINE: [Laughs] Why was it that you, uh, left, then, that town, at eighteen years old?

LYNN: Oh, it was too hard. I wanted to go out and see the world. And I took off.

LEVINE: Now, were you treated any differently because you were the first boy? You were the first boy in the family, but you had older sister.

LYNN: Yeah, Right?

LEVINE: Now, what was the difference, as far as how boys and girls were expected to act, or were treated, or, any big difference that you remember?

LYNN: No, there was no difference, no. No difference at all. We were all treated the same. Yeah.

LEVINE: But you wanted, you were adventurous, so . . .

LYNN: Yeah, Right?

LEVINE: So when did you tell?

LYNN: What did you do? Did you tell your mother and father you were going to just . . .

LYNN: No.

LEVINE: No?

LYNN: No. You couldn't leave Ireland that time, when I left. You had to, if you were working, you couldn't leave. You know, after the war it was hard. I went to England, and you had to get a release from the, they call it the Labor Exchange. And then you had to go to the guards and show them the release, that you weren't working. Right? So I got a release, but I wasn't supposed to get it. Somebody I knew.

LEVINE: And that release got you to England?

LYNN: No. You had to ----- they sh --- the guard issued you a travel permit, stamped by the guard, that you could leave the country. Right? But you had

to, you had to have this release from the Labor Exchange, you know, to say you weren't workin'. Because if you were workin' they wouldn't let you out, they wouldn't let you out of the country --- at that time. That was 1948, '49.

LEVINE: So, so, uh, you got that release signed, and where did you go?

LYNN: I went to London, England.

LEVINE: And did you stay there very long?

LYNN: I stayed there three years.

LEVINE: And what did you do then?

LYNN: I worked on construction --- on, uh, well, on construction. The first job I had was demo --- demolition houses, bombed out houses, tearing them right down. Right? After the war there was a lot of bombed out houses. They were all cracked. They had to come down, you know. Puttin' in pipes for the sewers. And then I got a ---- eventually I ended up driving a tractor, backfilling trenches with a tractor, you know, you dig a trench, put down pipes. (A telephone rings) (A dog barks) And then, uh, I backfilled. That wasn't too bad.

LEVINE: Should I turn this off once? (Break in tape) Okay, we're resuming now, after a break.

LYNN: Now we're in London.

LEVINE: We're in London, and . . .

LYNN: Right?

LEVINE: Were you, were there a lot of Irish fellows, uh . . .

LYNN: All Irish. We were all Irish. All Irish crew.

LEVINE: So you must have learned a lot of skills that you . . .

LYNN: No, not . . .

LEVINE: Certain things you didn't have done before.

LYNN: Oh, yes, oh, yeah. I learned to drive a tractor and a crane. I learned how to drive a crane.

LEVINE: So did you, did you enjoy being in ---?

LYNN: Yes, I did, yeah.

LEVINE: And, um, do you remember, uh, what was really different for you in London compared to with being in your town before that?

LYNN: Well, uh, yes. Well, it's hard to explain to somebody that, you were born here. Right? See, we always had something against England. We were taught not to like. They had tried to wipe out the Irish race. A lot of people don't believe that, but they did. So, uh, even in school we were taught that, you know.

LEVINE: And how was it being in the country with people that had tried to . . .

LYNN: I never had anything against it. Only workingman, I liked him very much. Those were workers – they --- we'd ---- English --- English people working with us, too. And, uh, nice people.

LEVINE: So it was a political thing. It wasn't the average . . .

LYNN: Right, yeah.

LEVINE: So you learned that, I suppose.

LYNN: I learned that, and I learned, you didn't ---- you got more reckless, because you think what they, they had our country, you know. We didn't get our freedom until 1948. That's when . . .

LEVINE: You were in London at that time.

LYNN: Yes, I was, yeah. And, uh, Ireland become a republic in 1948 . . .

LEVINE: Do you remember that day?

LYNN: Oh, I do, yeah. I remember it, very well, yeah. Uh, oh, I went mad. [Laughs] Well, I shouldn't say that, but --- would it was ni---a nice feeling. Yeah. Free. Right? Because we were always under the --- we belong to the commonwealth. We were part of England. England ruled, ruled the world, I think, one time.

LEVINE: But you, but then in 1948 . . .

LYNN: In 1948, Ireland become a republic, except six counties, that they're still fighting over. Right?

LEVINE: Okay. So what made you decide to leave London then?

LYNN: To see what's over here. See what's over the hill.

LEVINE: Okay. So, what, when, how did you go about the . . .

LYNN: All right, I'll tell you. I wanted to come to this country, and how old was I then? I think about twenty-three, or something. June, oh, yeah, it was June, when was the Korean War? The Korean War just start-- started in '51, was it? I think it was '51. I couldn't, you needed somebody to sponsor you out here. Right? So I had an aunt out here, and she went home to Ireland, and I went home from England. I wanted her to sponsor me. She wouldn't sponsor me. Right?

LEVINE: Why wouldn't she?

LYNN: You tell me. I don't know. She didn't want to sponsor me --- on account of the Korean War I think it was. She didn't want to be responsible. Because you know, they were getting off the boat that time and they were drafting them into the . . .

LEVINE: Oh, so she thought you might come to this country and be drafted?

LYNN: Drafted and get killed or something, and that she'd be responsible. All right? So I went to the American embassy. You know, when they're at war, you can come into this country. If you go to an embassy abroad, they wouldn't let you in here. I went to the emba --- the American embassy in London, and I told them I wanted to join the army, that the United States was at war in Korea. Right? They weren't at war. It was a police action. Right? In war,

you can do that when you're overseas if you go to the embassy. You can join the American Army. But Congress has to declare war, and Congress never declared war.

LEVINE: So you couldn't get in this way?

LYNN: I couldn't get in that way. Right?

LEVINE: So then what?

LYNN: Then I went from, uh, I applied for, uh, ---- well, we didn't have to apply. You could go. You could leave. I went to Canada. That's how I got, uh --- I went to Canada after that.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, first tell us, where did you leave from, when you took the ship, finally? Did you come from . . . ?

LYNN: Southampton.

LEVINE: Southampton. And do you remember the name of the ship?

LYNN: Yes, the Georgic, the S.S. Georgic. It was a troop ship. It was a former troop ship, the Georgic.

LEVINE: Okay. And then, uh, was there anything that sticks in your mind that happened on the voyage over on the Georgic.

LYNN: Oh, yes. We went to Ireland, and we met the Irish coming on the --- to come out on the tender, you know, from Cork? And they couldn't figure out how we got on the --- on the boat before they did.

LEVINE: How were you, who were you traveling with?

LYNN: I was traveling with another friend of mine, from my hometown, too.

LEVINE: So, okay. So, uh, then they took passengers on?

LYNN: Yeah, they took passengers on, yeah, yeah, from Cork. Southampton. No, the, from Southampton to Le Havre, in France. Then they went from Le Havre to Cove, Kingstown, Queenstown, it was called at that time, and they took passengers on there then. Now, we were supposed to get off at Nova Scotia, Canada. We were going to Canada. Right? But we didn't get off at Nova Scotia.

LEVINE: Well, how did you stay on?

LYNN: Oh, they didn't, nobody, anybody get --- nobody checked you there, get on. The ship was full. There was hundreds of people on there.

LEVINE: So what was your idea about staying on? What did you . . . ?

LYNN: Yeah, come into New York, to have a look at it anyway. Right? [Laughs]
We didn't want to get off there.

LEVINE: You didn't want to go to Canada?

LYNN: Well, we wanted to come here, but if we couldn't, we couldn't. We tried.
Right?

LEVINE: Okay. So the boat then came down . . .

LYNN: From Nova Scotia to New York.

LEVINE: And what happened then?

LYNN: Then immigration come on the ship, and they checked everyone. They says, "You can't come in here." So we said, "We're going to Canada." "Well," they said, "you should have got off at Nova Scotia. Right?" So now they're in a quandary. They don't know what to do. So they said, instead of taking us into custody or anything, they said, "Will you get on a train right away when you get off the boat?" And we said, "Sure we'll get on a train, right away." But we didn't get on a train. We got off all right, but we didn't get on a train to Canada. We got on a train that went up the Catskills for two weeks.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Were you tendered over to Ellis Island?

LYNN: Yes.

LEVINE: Tell me about that part. What happened to you?

LYNN: We just got off, that's it, and walked right through. They checked us. They checked us outside ---- outside the thing. They didn't check us in the thing.

LEVINE: They checked you on the boat.

LYNN: On the boat, yeah.

LEVINE: So what did they do at Ellis Island? Why did you have to go there?

LYNN: We had to get off the boat. We had to get off.

LEVINE: See, Ellis Island, you have to take, like, a ferry, or tender . . .

LYNN: Oh, we had no ferry. I don't know. Well, I don't know ---- must be. I have no idea.

LEVINE: Oh. So you might have actually just been at Battery Park in lower Manhattan.

LYNN: Oh, that could be it, yeah.

LEVINE: And you didn't actually have to go to Ellis Island.----

LYNN: [superposed] Oh, yeah, because we were . . .

LEVINE: because you were supposed to go on the train.

LYNN: Yeah, because we – we --- they checked us on the ---on the boat coming in. Right? That must be at Ellis Island, then.

LEVINE: No. You maybe never had to go to Ellis Island. Do you remember at all . . . ?

LYNN: No, I don't, no, no.

LEVINE: . . . being in the building?

LYNN: No.

LEVINE: No. Okay. So then that's, okay, so you were, you said you were going to get back on the train, but you didn't.

LYNN: We didn't.

LEVINE: What did you do instead?

LYNN: Went up to the Catskills for two weeks. It was summertime, right, for a vacation. And then we come back from the Catskills, back to New York, and got on the train coming to Montreal.

LEVINE: And did you stay there?

LYNN: No. We couldn't find a job.

LEVINE: You were traveling with one friend?

LYNN: Yeah, one friend, yes.

LEVINE: Is this someone you're still friends with?

LYNN: Oh, yes, yeah, long time ago. And I just heard from him after thirty years. There about – about a year ago. I got a telephone call here one night. Because we separated. I come in here. When I, well, the story is we went to Montreal, and they speak French there. They couldn't understand us, and we couldn't understand them. Even the police, policemen, they spoke French. And we went down to the Labor Exchange. They call them Labor Exchange there. You call them employment offices. Down to the Labor Exchange. The guy says, "How many boats come in today? Guys, there's

no work." So that night, that's after arriving from New York to Montreal. That night we got a train to Toronto. We heard they speak English over there. Right? So we got on the train, and got to Toronto, and we didn't know where to go, where to turn. We had very little money. I think we had ten dollars each in our pockets. And, uh, we get out at Union Station in Toronto, and we left our bags in the station, a bag each, and we didn't know where to turn.

So we spot this fellow coming up the street with a lunchbox, and he looked Irish, so we went over to him, and we told him we just come in to Canada and we were looking for work. So he directed us up to Bathurst Street, the Labor Exchange. Right? He put us on the streetcar. They had streetcars in Toronto. Now, we go up to the Labor Exchange and went in there, and nothing, no work. And then he says, "Well, I have one job for you, but it's out in the Northwest Territories, for the (?)," he says, "washing dishes for the army. Have you the money to go out there?" Right? We said no money. We didn't have nothing. So he says, "Go over there and sit down. I'll make a few calls."

He knew we had no money.or anything. We didn't have a place to stay. So, uh, we sat down and he was gone, then he called us over. He says, "Go down to Union Station." We told him where we come in, where our bags are. "And go in – go into this office, and ask for a John Reed [ph]." Right? I went into the office, back to Union Station. Where do you think we got the job? Right there at Union Station, with the Canadian Pacific Railroad, two of us. Right? So, he said, we filled out the application, he says, "You're hired. Start tomorrow."

LEVINE: What were you doing, building the railroad?

LYNN: No, on the railroads, putting down track. And those little huts along the

railroad, we painted them and do that. Regular labor work, painting or whatever. Some were --- people were looking to get the job. No money. Right? No place to stay. So then they sent us up to a hostel. He -- he --- the man in the labor exchange told us where to go. Stay in the hostel. I think it was only one or two dollars a night, two dollars a night. Right? So we go to work, down to Union Station, got to work, and we meet another Irish fellow. He was working already there. And he was married in there. He was married in Toronto, and he had a home. He says, "My wife keeps boarders. Why don't you come over and stay with us?" Sure enough, off we go.

LEVINE: So you went to the hostel.

LYNN: Oh, we did, we stayed there one night. Right? Went over to his house, picked up the bags and everything, went over to his house. And we got room and board for thirteen dollars a week each. All right? But the pay wasn't good. It was seventy-nine dollars a week, you know, the pay. It was good at that time. It was good money. Right? That's how we got the job in Toronto. Right? So I stayed there three years. He stayed. He stayed right through.

LEVINE: Did he stay until he retired?

LYNN: He stayed until he retired, yeah. I was talking to him on the phone. Somebody give him my phone number. He come, he got married in Canada, and he had four daughters. This is what he told me on the phone. The --- his wife died, and he got married again. You won't believe this. You know where he got married? Here in Floral Park, and I didn't even know it. Right? He met somebody at the weddin' --- you this girl, Bridie Mann [ph], and she knew my phone number. He called me here a while. I could not, he says, "You know who you're talking to?" I says, "I haven't a clue." It was

him, after all those years.

LEVINE: What did you do? You left there . . .

LYNN: I left there. I come in here.

LEVINE: And what did you do then? Was it just because you felt like you wanted to . . . ?

LYNN: I always wanted to come to this country. I didn't want to go to that other countrys. Well, it was the toss of a coin. We tossed a coin. It was easy to get to Australia at that time. It was only ten pounds. You know, the government --- the government, the Australian government, they wanted --- uh . . .

LEVINE: Wanted people to settle there.

LYNN: Wanted people to settle there. And we tossed a coin, Canada or Australia, and it come up Canada. We went to Canada. So . . .

LEVINE: So you got to New York, finally.

LYNN: Oh, I got to New York, finally, yeah.

LEVINE: And then what did you do?

LYNN: I got a job in one, in the second tallest building here in New York, in the Chrysler Building, elevator operator. Right? So I stayed there, oh, when? 1959. When did I come in? I stayed there for '53, '54, '55, '56, '57, five years, the Chrysler Building, takin' all the big shots up and down. And I got

to know some of them. Right?

LEVINE: Did you enjoy that?

LYNN: Oh, yeah, I enjoyed it. You meet nice people. You know, nice people. Beautiful people. And I got to know all the, all the bigwigs. So I asked one of the, one of the men. I says, "I need a job in your company." He says, "You got it. Tomorrow morning you get it." I got to know him. I'll tell you who that was --- Juan Trippe. He was the chairman of Pan American Airways. All right? I went out the next morning, and I was hired right away. He give me a note to give to the ----- to give to the ----- you know, where they hire.

LEVINE: At the airport?

LYNN: At the airport, yeah. That was in 1959. Right?

LEVINE: So what, were you working on the runway?

LYNN: I worked on the airport until I retired. I was there twenty-seven years.

LEVINE: And what were you doing?

LYNN: Oh, what was I doing there? [Laughs] You won't believe this. Usually they don't put an Irishman in there. I worked in liquor.

LEVINE: Really?

LYNN: Yeah.

LEVINE: You mean, taking it in, or . . .

LYNN: No, checking it. We have, uh, there's liquor on every plane. And the crew, they sell so much. Right? It has to be accounted for. And when that liquor comes in into the warehouse, we check it out, and there's papers inside telling you how many ----- how much is left in there, and how much she's sold. And then we make up a new batch, to go out on the ne--- on the plane again. We were plenty stashed, those liquor kits that come in with more liquor on ----- for another outfit going out. That's what I was doing. A nice job. An Irishman shouldn't go at that ---- handle liquor. A lot of people asked me that, "How'd you get this job, especially an Irishman?"

LEVINE: You must have performed well, or you wouldn't have stayed twenty-seven years.

LYNN: Oh, I was a good worker, like my father. Too much work. Some of them would get mad, you know, when you're do to much work. They didn't like it. Yeah, but I was very satisfied with the job. Thank you, Juan Trippe. Yeah.

LEVINE: So, uh, now what? Uh, you moved then, were you ever living in Manhattan?

LYNN: Oh, no.

LEVINE: When you were working on the elevator?

LYNN: No. Uh, I lived in Jackson Heights, 78th Street and Broadway.

LEVINE: Well, how did you meet your wife?

LYNN: Oh, I met her at the, an Irish dance, up on 86th Street in Manhattan.

LEVINE: Was this a dance you would go to?

LYNN: Yeah, it was an Irish, yes, the Jaeger House. It's called the Jaeger. I believe that still it's going. Yeah. I think it moved to another section. You know, it was over the bar. There was a dance hall over the bar. That's where I met her.

LEVINE: Do you know what you liked about her?

LYNN: Well, I knew she was a sheep stealer, so she wasn't too bad. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Tell what that means.

LYNN: What?

LEVINE: Explain for the tape what you mean by sheep stealer.

LYNN: Well, that's what you call the Roscommon people. Anyone that comes from Roscommon, they're a sheep stealer. Right? I don't know where they got that name. It's handed down to them, anyway. Actually, you know, they got that name. Maybe from long ago. Maybe they used to steal sheep or something. Who the hell knows.

LEVINE: So, okay, so, uh, then you must have moved out on Long Island while you were working at the airport?

LYNN: No. I moved, when I got married we moved to Woodside, and I got an

apartment on 48th Street. Metropolitan Apartment. A nice apartment there. And when I was working with Pan Am I found out about this house from a friend of mine, another Irishman, that worked with Pan Am. He said, "This house is for sale." So I come out and looked at it, and we bought it. Funny how we got it. Well, Eileen and I come out and we looked at it. The woman that was here, she says, "No, somebody else come and see it." It was him, my friend, he told me he come out without calling or anything. We knocked at the door. She showed us around the house, and she says, "No." She says, "You know what we'll do? I have people coming." She says, "Sit down the street in your car." I told her our car was down the street here. "And when you see the people coming, when you see them go, come back in again."

So we saw the people getting in, they got in with the two children, man and woman, two children, come in here, into the house. They were in here about an hour. We're sittin' in the car. And, uh, we saw them leave. When they left, we come up the dorm, we asked, we asked, "Mrs. Howell, that lived here." "Oh," she says, "the house is gone, sold." "Well," I says, "if you hear of anything, go on and let me know." So I left the phone number. Right?

And, uh, two weeks after the phone rings, and who was it but Mrs. Howell. She says, "Are you still interested in the house?" I says, "Yes, I am." Well she says, "Come on out." I says, "How much?" "What you offered?" She

was ---- I was offered, uh, that's two thousand dollars cheaper than I offered her, uh, I offered her twenty-five. Right? But the other people must have offered her twenty-three or something. She says, "Twenty-three thousand." Has to mean the first time I offered twenty-five to her. I don't know what happened, whether she got mixed up with the people coming. I says, "I'll take it." And I got the house for twenty-three thousand. Right?"

LEVINE: And you've been here ever since?

LYNN: I've been here ever since, yeah.

LEVINE: Tell me, do you think there are some customs that you have that you carried with you that you had in Ireland? Is there any way that (?).

LYNN: Customs?

LEVINE: Any of the ways of doing things, ways of thinking, or . . .

LYNN: Oh, the thinking, well, yes. In Ireland ---- you see, he--- people here I found different. People here are very broad-minded, very open-minded. They're not like that over there. I was like them over there. Like the people that's in Ireland now, I think they're not as open-minded as Americans. And, uh, I brought that here with me, that that, you know . . .

LEVINE: Sort of narrow-minded?

LYNN: Right? You know. Uh, you're afraid to say anything, you know, that you

might, uh. But now, since I've been living here, nothing bothers me, talking about anything, you know. But over there ----- I don't know I don't know what I want. That's why I ---- I brought the . . .

LEVINE: A big change.

LYNN: Yeah, it's a big change, you know. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: Are there any other ways you've changed, do you think since you---left Ireland?

LYNN: Well, I always thought I'd go back to Ireland.

LEVINE: You did?

LYNN: When I come here first. You know. Everyone thinks that. I think.

LEVINE: What did, you mean you think you'll come here . . .

LYNN: Make my money, and then go back. Right? But, uh, that changes.

LEVINE: Why?

LYNN: It's not li--- it's not like that at all.

LEVINE: Why do you think you changed your mind about that?

LYNN: Well, you know, with the airlines, I could fly every day if I wanted back to

Ireland. I got free flights. We --- we had a system at Pan American. We made out our own tickets. All you had to do was go to the airport, any place you wanted to go. You didn't have to go to no ticket office even. There was a thing there at the airport to stamp it, you know, for the tickets ----- just write up the tickets. All you need was blanks, blank tickets. I used to go back a lot. But then, uh, why did I ---- why did I

LEVINE: Why did you change your mind?

LYNN: Why did I change my mind? This is a great life here in the United States. You won't find it, any ---- you won't find it any ---any place. Because if you, it's all right to go back for a vacation. When you go back there and you, you know --- you know what it was beforehand, and then you're thinking what it was, and then thinking what, how you're living here, like the hard times we had over there. Right? Working for nothing.

LEVINE: You didn't change that much as far as you being able to work and make a good living.

LYNN: Yeah. And, well, I don't. Oh, all's changed. Oh, that's all changed. People there now, plenty of money, but, uh, they have more money than ever we had when I was growing up. People there, uh, they didn't like to see you come home with a lot of money and buy a big house. They're jealous of, if you, if I sold this house now and go back there, buy ---maybe I get twice this,

twice a better house than this for the money. Right? They don't like it. They don't like that. Now, I can't figure that one out.

LEVINE: Maybe it goes back to the narrow-mindedness that you were describing.

LYNN: That's that's what I think. Yeah. They're very closed about things, you know. And they're afraid what somebody will think about --- about you, you know what I mean? Like, uh, oh, this one, he'll ----oh, he'll say something, you know, that this is the way they think that, uh, they don't want to do wrong or something. You know, they don't want to see anything out of the way.

LEVINE: So they care what everybody thinks more over there.

LYNN: Right. Here they don't, they're not like that. They're more conscious. I know, I even, I thought my sister'd change. She's in London, but she's in an Irish neighborhood, in London. I thought she'd have changed, you know, leaving Ireland. She's the same ways. Right? I can't understand that. Well, now, I'm very open-minded now about things. Maybe I'm saying too much for this tape here. [Laughs] Right?

LEVINE: No. It's been wonderful to explore what actually happened.

LYNN: Yeah.

LEVINE: People come to this country.

LYNN: Right?

LEVINE: And they, they change.

LYNN: You know when you love this country? When you go over and see how they live. You don't know what ---- how the other people live. I've been in a lot of countries. I've been to Japan, and every place. I've been down South America, too. That's when you appreciate the United States. Believe me. I know I do, anyway.

LEVINE: If you were to divide yourself up and say part of you was Irish and part of you was American, what would be the parts that fall into each category?

LYNN: That's a tough one. You know, you know you're pulling so----- . . .

LEVINE: Yeah, but you're great, 'cause you're able to think about it. I mean, it's not a kind of question you usually get asked.

LYNN: Yeah, I know.

LEVINE: Think of any kind of answer to that.

LYNN: Oh, I used to say that to, uh, to an Irish American here. He'd never answer. He was born here. He was more for Ireland than I was, and he was born here. You know what I mean? And I used to ask him that, you know.

LEVINE: And he never answered.

LYNN: He could --- he could never, he never answered. Like me, now, I don't know

how to answer that. My allegiance is here. Right? But is just what you're asking me would I fight against other Irish?

LEVINE: Would you?

LYNN: Would I fight against other Irish?

LEVINE: Oh, no. I wasn't going that far. I was just thinking, you know . . .

LYNN: Well, that's what I used to . . .

LEVINE: Aspects of your personality that you consider Irish, and other aspects you consider American.

LYNN: American, oh, American, yeah. Oh, I'm American now. American citizen. This is ---- this is my country now. Ireland is, you know, Ireland is there, you know. Wherever anyone is born, they'll always think ---- they're always thinking of, you know, where you were born. Even in birds, they'll always go back to, you know, they like to go back to where they were born.

LEVINE: So you were asking your friend, though, if he would be willing to fight for Ireland.

LYNN: No, would he fight, if he was, well . . .

LEVINE: Would fight America?

LYNN: Yeah, fight America, yeah. Right? (They laugh)

LEVINE: Right down to the nitty-gritty.

LYNN: Yeah, Right? [Laughs] He didn't know what to say. You know, he got mad at me once about it, actually. "Why don't you answer me? You're always talking you're Irish. I ---- suppos---- supposing Ireland attacked the United States or something?" You know, just fooling around.

LEVINE: Well, uh, let's see. What do you feel most proud of that you've done in your life?

LYNN: Oh, what do you mean? Most proud of. Well, I th--- I think I accomplished a lot with no education. I had no education. Not much at all, you know. Schools were, most the schools, they weren't that good. There was no, we had no chance at college. No colleges, no doctors, no dentists, no nothing like that. Nothing around there. This is my time. Now they have all that.

LEVINE: In your time, speaking about medical attention, what kind of -- what kind of treatment did you get if somebody was sick?

LYNN: No. You'd have to ----they'd have to take you to the hospital.

LEVINE: You didn't have any medicine.

LYNN: Yeah. In the next town, the dispensary. They called it a dispensary. They might take you into the next town. Doctors weren't very good either. Believe me. It was a hard, hard life.

LEVINE: Did people practice any kind of folk medicine, or . . .

LYNN: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Themselves, instead of going to a doctor?

LYNN: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of it?

LYNN: Oh, yeah. Like my ankle broke -- broken, and I went to the, I went to a woman. She was no doctor, but she set the, she set the ankle. We called her the bonesetter. Yeah. Mrs. Clune [ph]. I'll show you a picture of her later. I have a picture of her down here in the basement. And . . .

LEVINE: So there was a bonesetter, and how about any other kind of medical kinds of treatment at least?

LYNN: Yeah, uh, for, uh, during the war everybody in, everybody around the area --- - everybody got a rash. Spots come out on them. Everybody. They didn't know what it was. Right? So we went to this man. He was for ----I -- I went to him, too. His name was Peter Oland [ph]. And he was supposed to have powers more than anybody. He was the seventh son of the seventh son. Did you ever hear tell of that? Well, he was just (?). Well, he give us some kind of a brew, burn the back off you. But I didn't notice it. It went away,

anyway.

LEVINE: So they put it on your back or you drank it.?

LYNN: Yeah, no, you didn't drink it ---- no, no just rub it on. Some kind of liniment, -
--burns.

LEVINE: So did a lot of people go to him?

LYNN: Yes, a lot of people. The seventh son of the seventh son. You heard this?

LEVINE: Yes, I have heard of that. So, in other words, that was something that was
looked up to, the seventh son of the seventh son?

LYNN: Yeah, Right? Oh, yeah. He give me a big bottle of it, you know, to put it on
us.

LEVINE: Well, um, gee, we're just about finished with the tape. Is there anything else
you can think of that you want to say before we close?

LYNN: Well, his wife used to be able to cure ringworm.

LEVINE: Oh.

LYNN: Did you ever hear tell of ringworm, like a (?)? You went to her. She could
cure it. I don't know how she could cure it. She had some ways of curing it.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, uh, I want to thank you very much for this unexpected

commentary.

LYNN: You're welcome.

LEVINE: It was nice to talk with you, and thank you.

LYNN: You're welcome.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine. I'm signing off. I'm in Mineola, Long Island, NY with John Lynn, who came from Ireland in 1951 when he was twenty-four years old.

LYNN: Right?

LEVINE: And I'm signing off.

LYNN: Okay, thank you.