

EI-514

CECELIA FLANAGAN ZEILAN

BIRTH DATE: MARCH 11, 1905

INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 2, 1994

RUNNING TIME: 22:57

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PhD

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: PETITE FLEUR NURSING HOME  
SAYVILLE, NEW YORK

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 11/1998

TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

IRELAND, 1925

AGE 18 (AS RECORDED IN THE INTERVIEW)

PASSAGE ON "THE REPUBLIC"

LEVINE: Today is August 2, 1994. And I'm here, uh, at the Petite Fleur Nursing Home in Sayville, Long Island, New York. I'm here with Cecelia Flanagan Zeilan, who came from Ireland in 1925 when she was eighteen years old. Well, I'm very happy that I met you, Cecelia, and I look forward to hearing what you remember about Ireland and coming here. Why don't we start by your saying your birth date for the tape? Your birth date.

ZEILAN: 19, my birth date. Wait a minute.

LEVINE: Take your time.

ZEILAN: 19, uh, 1905.

LEVINE: And March 11th.

ZEILAN: March 11, 19 . . .

LEVINE: Where were you born in Ireland?

ZEILAN: In Galway.

LEVINE: In Galway. Did you live in Galway up until you left for the United States?

ZEILAN: I lived in the suburbs.

LEVINE: In the suburbs. Was there a small town or village?

ZEILAN: A village.

LEVINE: A village. Did that village have a name?

ZEILAN: Yeah. Frinch Fort.

LEVINE: Could you spell it, please?

ZEILAN: F-R-I-N-C-H, and Fort. Frinch Fort.

LEVINE: Oh, French Fort. Okay. And, um, so, tell me what French Fort looked like.

ZEILAN: It was a big farm. My father had a good many acres.

LEVINE: And what did he raise on it?

ZEILAN: Cattle and sheep and pigs, and everything else.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And . . .

ZEILAN: And goats, horses and cows.

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

ZEILAN: Martin.

LEVINE: Martin. Martin Flanagan?

ZEILAN: Yes.

LEVINE: And your mother's name?

ZEILAN: Murphy.

LEVINE: And what was her first name?

ZEILAN: Mary.

LEVINE: Mary Murphy. And was your, were your mother and father also from Galway?

ZEILAN: Yeah. My father didn't know my mother when he got married to her.

LEVINE: He didn't?

ZEILAN: No. It was a match, somebody made a match up with him.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. ( an public address announcement is heard in the background on the tape ) So, uh, do you think they were pleased with the match?

ZEILAN: Oh, yes. Nine children, nine boys they had. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: Nine boys and you?

ZEILAN: Yeah, and me, three girls.

LEVINE: And three girls. Wow. So, uh, do you remember all your, the names of all your brothers and sisters?

ZEILAN: Yes, I do. I think I do.

LEVINE: Do you want to say them?

ZEILAN: Patrick, James, John, one, I think he died, John died. (?) Eddie, Edward.

LEVINE: Were you closest to any particular one of your family?

ZEILAN: Yes, my oldest brother.

LEVINE: That was Patrick? Uh-huh. Okay. So where did you

fall in line with the children?

ZEILAN: Sixth.

LEVINE: You were sixth. Uh-huh. And, um, what was it about Patrick that you liked so much?

ZEILAN: He was a good boy, good. He used to work for the government.

LEVINE: He worked for the government.

ZEILAN: Yes, he did. He was a big shot in the mail.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, what did you, what do you remember about your childhood? What kinds of things did you do?

ZEILAN: Mind children.

LEVINE: You minded your younger brothers and sisters?

ZEILAN: Right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Did you go to school at all?

ZEILAN: Sure.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And did you like school?

ZEILAN: Yes, I did.

LEVINE: Yeah. What, what did you like about it?

ZEILAN: I learned Latin, and I learned, I didn't learn, like my mother wouldn't let us learn Gaelic, because when she went to school, they hit her because she spoke nothing but Gaelic. And she said, "I'm not going to hit you. Let the nuns hit you." And my father was one of those would bag you potatoes and give you the nuns. (?) his cousin. And the nuns never starved. They always had plenty of potatoes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did your father grow potatoes as well as have livestock?

ZEILAN: Yes, he did. Yes, he did.

LEVINE: What were you chores as a little girl, besides taking care of your sisters and brothers? Did you have any other chores?

ZEILAN: Yes. I had to do the washing.

LEVINE: And how did you do that? ( Mrs. Zeilan laughs ) On a washboard?

ZEILAN: ( she laughs ) Yes.

LEVINE: And, um, did you have running water in your house?

ZEILAN: I had to draw it from a well.

LEVINE: And where did you go to do the washing? Where was the water? Where was the well?

ZEILAN: The well is a little further down than the house.

LEVINE: So what would you do? You would go and get the water?

ZEILAN: And pump it.

LEVINE: And pump it, and bring it home?

ZEILAN: Home.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Oh, boy.

ZEILAN: And I did milk the cows.

LEVINE: You didn't?

ZEILAN: I did.

LEVINE: Oh, you did. Did you like doing that?

ZEILAN: Oh, didn't, I had to do what I had to do.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ZEILAN: If my mother said do it, you did it.

LEVINE: Was your, what was your mother like?

ZEILAN: They were very strict. She, she didn't do any work at all.

LEVINE: She didn't?

ZEILAN: No. You did the work, not my mother. She wouldn't dirty her hands.

LEVINE: So what did she do with her time?

ZEILAN: Sits, like, knitted, crocheted. Not, knitted.

LEVINE: And, um, what kind of a man was your father?

ZEILAN: He was a very good father.

LEVINE: What was his personality like?

ZEILAN: Very good. He was redheaded. I had, I had that kind of hair. I don't have it now.

LEVINE: Oh, you had red hair.

ZEILAN: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Um, let's see, what else? Well, how about grandparents? Did you have grandparents?

ZEILAN: No.

LEVINE: And, uh, do you remember how it was that you came to the United States?

ZEILAN: I just, there was some, somebody had to go, because my mother paid for her, so she, she, somebody had to give the money.

LEVINE: You mean, your mother had a ticket?

ZEILAN: Oh, she, no. She, she got money from her cousin.

LEVINE: Oh.

ZEILAN: And she kept for the, for, somebody wanted to go to America, otherwise they wouldn't have any money.

LEVINE: Why did you want to go?

ZEILAN: Because, I just wanted to go, that's all.

LEVINE: You just thought you'd like it better.

ZEILAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you have any idea what it was like before you came?

ZEILAN: No. I had a girlfriend who went to school with me,

and she always says, "You would never go to America, but I'll go." Because when my sister says to her, and I came out to be with her sisters. And she, she, I was the one that went in place of her, and she, she's all along the one that wanted to go to America. But I said, "Well, I'm going."

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, so you went in place of her?

ZEILAN: Not in place of her, because she, she annoyed me so much, that I (?) we wouldn't go.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Oh, in other words, she used to, she used to, um . . .

ZEILAN: Needle me.

LEVINE: Needle you that she was going to go and you weren't.

ZEILAN: Yes.

LEVINE: But then you decided you were going to go.

ZEILAN: I decided, there and there I had decided.

LEVINE: I see. So did you have a temper as a little girl?

ZEILAN: Naturally, yeah.

LEVINE: Because you had red hair, right?

ZEILAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: I see. Okay. So, um, let's see. Do you remember leaving? Do you remember packing up? No. Where did you go from? Where did you leave from?

ZEILAN: Cork.

LEVINE: Cork?

ZEILAN: That's where I took the boat.

LEVINE: From Cork?

ZEILAN: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And the name of the boat?

ZEILAN: Republic.

LEVINE: And did you have examinations in Ireland?

ZEILAN: Yes.

LEVINE: What were they like?

ZEILAN: Just a regular physical.

LEVINE: And, uh, you said you were traveling with someone.

Tell me about that.

ZEILAN: She was, I had a job in a store. They didn't, they didn't, they didn't call it the same as they call here.

LEVINE: I can't, can you talk a little louder?

ZEILAN: They called it a different name over in Ireland, a regular store.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZEILAN: Here you call, different.

LEVINE: Well, this person who traveled with you, who was it?

ZEILAN: She was, a girl I met in the store.

LEVINE: Oh, you met her in the store.

ZEILAN: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And she wanted to come to America, too?

ZEILAN: She, she was going to meet her husband here.

LEVINE: Oh.

ZEILAN: She wasn't married yet. She was going to meet her.

LEVINE: Oh, she was going to be what you call a mailorder bride?

ZEILAN: She was going to be, I guess she was.

LEVINE: In other words, she was going to meet someone to marry.

ZEILAN: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And, uh, did, uh, how did she feel about that?

ZEILAN: She was very good. She was in the same room as I was. She had, I had the top bed, and she had the bottom.

LEVINE: And, uh, when you got, when you, uh, did anything happen aboard ship?

ZEILAN: No.

LEVINE: Was there any kind of experiences on ship that you remember?

ZEILAN: No. Only this man that came over at me. He said, he said, "You'd better be good, because you have the sky open, it's the world." ( they laugh )

LEVINE: ( she laughs ) Uh-huh. The sky's up, and the sea's

down. Yeah. Okay. Well, um, let's see. Uh, so you were on the Republic.

ZEILAN: Yes.

LEVINE: And were you down in the steerage?

ZEILAN: No. I was, I had a good passage.

LEVINE: A cabin?

ZEILAN: A cabin.

LEVINE: Yeah. Now, um, did your, uh . . .

ZEILAN: I had portholes in mine.

LEVINE: Oh, so you were in first or second class.

ZEILAN: I think I was in the second class.

LEVINE: Second class. Uh-huh. And did, you said your aunt sent money? Who, how did you . . .

ZEILAN: My cousin, my cousin sent money to my mother. He was a first cousin. He was in this country. He sent money for her to, if she wanted to send somebody to America, he'd give her money, and he did.

LEVINE: How did your mother feel about you going? Did she,

did she want you to go? Yeah. Well, tell me, tell me about when the ship came into the New York Harbor.

Did . . .

ZEILAN: They was (?).

LEVINE: They was, what?

ZEILAN: I was supposed to go to Boston, one of those girls were, but I never got to that, Boston. Somebody met me there, my mother's cousin.

LEVINE: I see. Do you remember when the Republic sailed into the New York Harbor?

ZEILAN: I don't know.

LEVINE: Do you remember the Statue of Liberty?

ZEILAN: Yes, I do.

LEVINE: What was that like, seeing the statue?

ZEILAN: That's when we had, the boat was at sea.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Did you know what it was then?

ZEILAN: No, I didn't.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And tell me everything about Ellis

Island that you remember.

ZEILAN: Nothing happened at Ellis Island. We just got a physical, ate and got a blanket, and nothing else.

LEVINE: Did you stay overnight?

ZEILAN: I, this party, a cousin of my mother, picked me up.

LEVINE: At Ellis Island.

ZEILAN: And she was, the party was ( an public address announcement is heard in the background on the tape )  
(?) her brother-in-law.

LEVINE: I'm sorry. Could you say that again, please?

ZEILAN: The party that I came out with was her brother-in-law.  
So it was like one family, and he didn't leave me there. He said, "I'll take you to my other sister," and I went to the other sister, and she had fourteen children. And I made, I made the fourteen for her, she had thirteen of her own. And we were close, so close, all along.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Where did you go to? Where was she living, the woman with the fourteen children?

ZEILAN: Brooklyn.

LEVINE: In Brooklyn, uh-huh. And, um, so did you stay with them for a while?

ZEILAN: I went to work.

LEVINE: What kind of work did you do?

ZEILAN: Housework. Mind children.

LEVINE: You had a lot of experience doing that.

ZEILAN: Yeah, I know.

LEVINE: Well, um, did you, do you remember, like, your first few weeks in this country what, what it was that struck you as very different?

ZEILAN: They didn't (?) their food, I'll tell you.

LEVINE: They didn't?

ZEILAN: No.

LEVINE: You had better food at home.

ZEILAN: Sure.

LEVINE: Before you left.

ZEILAN: When, uh, when I was home I, they gave me cabbage. Here, when I was here, they gave me cabbage cooked with water. And I had no cabbage, I had no (?) water.

It was horrible. So I left myself. I got another job. I looked in the paper. I wasn't no dopey.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So what did you find in the paper?

ZEILAN: Another job.

LEVINE: Also taking care of children?

ZEILAN: No. Cooking.

LEVINE: Cooking? Oh! You didn't like the food, so you got a job as a cook. That was good.

ZEILAN: I worked for Darcy and Grant, and she had, her mother was from Ireland. Her mother was born in Ireland, anyhow. And she would never let me down the cellar to wash clothes. Everything was for me not, she looked out for me. "I won't let you down to cook, wash clothes in the cellar."

LEVINE: So she was nice to you.

ZEILAN: Yes.

LEVINE: Well, that's good. Did you live there as well?

ZEILAN: I lived there. I didn't get much money, about seventy-five dollars a month.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And board and room.

ZEILAN: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, uh, what, how long did you stay there?

ZEILAN: I quit there, too.

LEVINE: Oh, you did? Yeah, and then what?

ZEILAN: And I got married.

LEVINE: How did you meet your husband?

ZEILAN: Through those friends. They, they worked in the sugar factory, and he worked in the Transit Authority as a conductor. And he used to get me, this is her sister and him, her, her sister, and he would give them half fare. The mother invited me down to the house, because he was good. He was wonderful, really.

LEVINE: What was his name?

ZEILAN: Uh, Adam.

LEVINE: Adam Zeilan.

ZEILAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZEILAN: I told you, they had the name cut off.

LEVINE: I'm sorry, say it again.

ZEILAN: Spelled out, is the name shortened.

LEVINE: Oh, what was it to begin with it?

ZEILAN: Z-E-I-L-I-A-N-S-K-I.

LEVINE: Oh.

ZEILAN: They were Polish way.

LEVINE: Polish.

ZEILAN: But he was, he never spelled it that way.

LEVINE: I see. So, when you got married, then what? Where, did you stop working? Did you keep working?

ZEILAN: No. He wouldn't let me work. I told you that.

LEVINE: Yeah. Tell it for the tape.

ZEILAN: He wouldn't let me work. I said, the girls were working in the factory making a lot of money. I said, "Well, I'm going to work." He said, "You work, I quit." And he would. I know he'd do that.

LEVINE: You know he would have.

ZEILAN: I know he would have.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So did you, did you always have friends, a lot of friends who were from Ireland, once you were here in this country?

ZEILAN: I had a few friends, but not really.

LEVINE: Yeah. So then did you have children?

ZEILAN: Three.

LEVINE: And their names?

ZEILAN: ( she is moved ) She died.

LEVINE: Oh, I'm sorry.

ZEILAN: And she had four children. (?) You see all the pictures in the room. Did you see them?

LEVINE: No, I didn't see them. So, but, this is, this is your

oldest child?

ZEILAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then you had two other children?

ZEILAN: A boy (?). ( an public address announcement is heard  
in the background on the tape )

LEVINE: Pardon?

ZEILAN: I had a (?) married his wife. She was . . .

LEVINE: ARE you talking about your children now?

ZEILAN: Now I'm talking about my children.

LEVINE: So now you have grandchildren?

ZEILAN: I have so many I don't know . . .

LEVINE: You don't even know how many. How about great-  
grandchildren?

ZEILAN: God knows I must have.

LEVINE: You've got those, too. Uh-huh, uh-huh. What do you  
feel really proud of that you've done in your  
lifetime?

ZEILAN: I was good with my kids.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And, uh, do you think coming here as an eighteen-year-old girl from Ireland made a big difference in the rest of your life?

ZEILAN: I guess it did.

LEVINE: Can you think of any ways that it might have . . .

ZEILAN: I got a good husband.

LEVINE: Well, that's a lot, isn't it?

ZEILAN: Yeah, it's a lot. He wouldn't let me carry one little bit of, we go shopping in the store, he wouldn't let me carry one bundle. He'd say, "You can't carry a bundle." He wouldn't let me do anything, carry any packages.

LEVINE: So did you, did you stay in Brooklyn?

ZEILAN: No. I lived in Richmond Hill.

LEVINE: Richmond Hill, uh-huh. Is that in Staten Island?

ZEILAN: No, that's in Queens.

LEVINE: In Queens. Uh-huh.

ZEILAN: You know Jamaica Hospital?

LEVINE: Yeah.

ZEILAN: That was Richmond Hill Hospital.

LEVINE: I see.

ZEILAN: But now they call it Jamaica Hospital. They call it everything now.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else that you can think of that has to do with, do you keep some of the ways of people who live in Ireland, things that you learned as a, as a girl?

ZEILAN: I go to Ireland lots of times.

LEVINE: Oh, you do? Uh-huh.

ZEILAN: I had a niece over there, and she takes care of me when I get here.

LEVINE: Oh, nice.

ZEILAN: I pay her. I can afford to pay her.

LEVINE: Oh, that's nice. So your husband's worked for the Transit Authority until he retired?

ZEILAN: He died.

LEVINE: Oh, he died before he retired. Uh-huh. I see.

ZEILAN: He retired, he was retired two years, and then he died. You know, he used to drive the train, I mean, got the train stop. His heart was in his mouth when he thought somebody would jump out in front of the train.

LEVINE: Oh. Okay. Well, is there anything else that you can, that you would like to say about this country, or coming to this country? Anything else you can think of before we close?

ZEILAN: What else would I think of? I had a good life here.

LEVINE: Good. Okay.

ZEILAN: My husband was wonderful.

LEVINE: You had a nice husband. That's wonderful. Okay. Okay. Well, I'm talking with Cecelia Flanagan Zeilan, who came in 1925 at the age of eighteen from Ireland, and, uh, now, let's see, you're eighty-nine years old, and it's August 2, 1994, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.