

EI-544/ROBERTS

EI-544

MARY MCCREIGHT MADDOCK ROBERTS

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IRELAND, 1909

AGE: 12

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PORT:

RESIDENCES:

MATSEN: Good afternoon. This is Elysa Matsen for the National Park Service. Today is September fourteenth. It's a Wednesday afternoon in 1994. And I'm in the home of Mrs. Mary Roberts in California, who came from Ireland, Belfast, Ireland in the year 19, 1910, I think.

ROBERTS: I never was any good at figures.

MATSEN: Okay. Well, that's okay. Why don't you start by giving me your date of birth?

ROBERTS: I was eleven year old, February and my—

MATSEN: I think that's 1909, 1909.

ROBERTS: And I arrived in New York—

MATSEN: Why don't we start--. Can you give me your full name and your date of birth?

ROBERTS: Yes. Mary Ann Roberts and—

MATSEN: When were you born?

ROBERTS: We arrived in, in New York when I was eleven years old.

MATSEN: Okay. Do you remember in Ireland, do you remember what your house looked like, when you were in Ireland?

ROBERTS: Oh yes.

MATSEN: Tell me what it looked like.

ROBERTS: Twenty-nine River Street. I can remember that.

MATSEN: Tell me what it looked like.

ROBERTS: Well it was a parlor house. It was made of brick. And they were all joined together. And it had bay windows that my grandmother kept flowers in.

MATSEN: What kind of flowers?

ROBERTS: I can't remember, only green. And there was no, no, no [unclear]. And my grandmother and my aunt and my cousin, two cousins, only different names—

MATSEN: What were their names?

ROBERTS: Lived there, too.

MATSEN: What were their names?

ROBERTS: My cousin, Jennie Murphy. She was killed in this war. A bomb dropped on River Street. And her husband and two children, I think she had. And my cousin, Dylan, came with us to America, and she was five years younger than I.

MATSEN: Do you remember what your town looked like? Can you tell me what the town looked like?

ROBERTS: You mean Belfast?

MATSEN: Belfast, um-hmm.

ROBERTS: All I remember is going over the [unclear] bridge. And they had one place where you--. What was the name of that street? Oh, it had a big arch, brick. Hollywood, Hollywood, I think. And it had a big arch. And it used to have--. Eve and I used to go look at it and imagine it was faces, pictures of faces in it. Then went over a little river to go on the, on the other side.

MATSEN: What was your father's name?

ROBERTS: William Maddock Roberts. No, William Maddock. It wasn't Roberts.

MATSEN: And, and what did he look like?

ROBERTS: Oh, I couldn't tell you much about my father because I saw very little of him.

MATSEN: How tall was he?

ROBERTS: Though I lived with his mother and his sister. My mother died when I was born.

MATSEN: What was her name?

ROBERTS: Mary Jane.

MATSEN: And her maiden name?

ROBERTS: Mary Jane Maddock.

UNKNOWN FEMALE: McCreight.

MATSEN: Okay.

UF: Was her maiden name.

ROBERTS: Her maiden name?

UF: Before she got married. She was a McCreight.

ROBERTS: She was grandma's daughter.

MATSEN: Well that's okay.

ROBERTS: Mary Jane.

MATSEN: Have you seen pictures of her? What did she look like? Did you see pictures of your mother?

ROBERTS: Oh yes.

MATSEN: What did she look like?

ROBERTS: Bobby's got lots of pictures. She—

MATSEN: Can you tell me what she looked like?

ROBERTS: No. I don't even notice on the pictures. And Bobby [unclear] because she's—

MATSEN: Okay. What did your father do?

ROBERTS: My mother and father were in this country at one time. But my mother didn't like it. And she--. But at that time her mother and father were living in [unclear], not Belfast.

MATSEN: Do you know their names?

ROBERTS: And—

MATSEN: Your grandparents.

ROBERTS: My mother--. Let's see--. I should know that.

MATSEN: Well we're stretching way far back so—

ROBERTS: My father and my mother [unclear] Mary Jane Maddock, of course, because that was my father's name. And she died when I was born.

MATSEN: Your brothers and sisters?

ROBERTS: Yes.

MATSEN: What were their names?

ROBERTS: Well, I don't remember all their names. My mother had three children in this country. Two of them were twins. Bobby could tell you all that.

MATSEN: Okay. What can you remember though? You tell me whatever you can remember of the names.

ROBERTS: Well [unclear]. The two, the twins were girls. And they died. And Bobby's even seen their graves [unclear]. And then she had a boy named Samuel that went sickly. And that was--. And her mother and father were living at that time in [unclear]. And that was why I guess she was so homesick. Afterward she was kind of sorry that they did go home because then she died when I was born. So I did--. I don't remember ever seeing my mother. I know that my whole life was my grandmother because—

MATSEN: What was your grandmother's name?

ROBERTS: Bella, Isabella. Isabelle Garrow, before she was married. Funny I can remember things like that.

MATSEN: Well, whatever you can remember, that's what [unclear]. In your house living with your grandmother do you remember what she used to cook for dinner? What would she make for dinner?

ROBERTS: Oh, she made a lot of stews. I know because my elder cousin, Jenny Murphy, used to get up and [unclear]. I don't remember me ever being tired of them. But I know that I heard Jenny complain about stews. And she also made potato pie. I remember those plain because she made them on an iron griddle. And she--. Then you make them with mashed potatoes not like the German do. And I loved them with lots of butter. [Laughs]

MATSEN: What'd you eat--? What would you have for dessert? Do you remember that? Did you ever have any dessert, something sweet?

ROBERTS: Very little. I had very little ice cream. But though we did have an ice cream parlor at the corner.

MATSEN: Did you go to that ice cream parlor?

ROBERTS: You did go to sit. I went to my next door neighbor and she was a Scotch woman. And she used to send me to buy this ice cream and take it home. My Aunt Esther, why she didn't send her own little boy, you know, because she always gave me a penny for going. [Laughs] And she said because when Mary goes we get ice cream, when I send my own son he puts his finger in [laughs] all the way home I guess. [Laughs]

MATSEN: So there was never any left when he would go.

ROBERTS: So, so I know we had ice cream. We didn't have it very often. We had very plain food.

MATSEN: What kind of vegetables would you eat?

ROBERTS: Oh lots and lots and lots of vegetables.

MATSEN: What kind was your favorites?

ROBERTS: Carrots. And parsnip I didn't like. Cabbage and very fresh vegetables, good vegetables. My grandmother was very good at that. And fish. I, we had real good fish.

MATSEN: What was dinnertime like in your house? Do you remember? Would people talk at the table?

ROBERTS: Yes, we all enjoyed our supper. Breakfast was a very hurried thing because my grandmother was old. After all, my grandmother had already named, raised nine children and buried one. And she still fretted over the one. But—

MATSEN: How did that--? How did that person die?

ROBERTS: A baby. The last one that she had was a delicate child evidently. And it died. After that she raised this other Jenny Murphy till she was fully grown. Then she had me. My grandmother was a wonderful woman.

MATSEN: It sounds like it. What about religion? What do you remember about religion in your house?

ROBERTS: Oh we had--. We preached like, like some people do. But we were taught that, that God was a power, great, wise and true being who made all things. And we believed it. I went to the church school, the Episcopal church school. And we had--. I got a certificate on religion. Too bad I didn't save that. Because that was the one thing I was really good at was religion.

MATSEN: Did you pray in the house? Did you pray [unclear]?

ROBERTS: I still believe all that you put into the lives of others will come back into your own. I was taught that and that was--. My grandmother was--. But there was no--. We had an uncle that got tied up in some religion that was preach, preach, preach all the time until people didn't want to see him, not even my grandmother. My own grandmother I remember one time when she was sick. And he was standing there praying for her. Her son-in-law, her daughter Rose Ellen's husband. [Laughs] And, yeah, she tapped him on the back. I was sitting there listening with--. I was

always with my grandmother. And she tapped him on the back and she said, I would rather you go home and help Rose Ellen with those, all those children. My Aunt Rose Ellen had nine children. And they had these big families. And I think you'd be doing more, be doing more good for the Lord than my prayers. So you know we weren't over religious.

MATSEN: What were holidays like in your house? Do you remember Christmas growing up, what it was like?

ROBERTS: Cooking.

MATSEN: What would you make?

ROBERTS: Oh I made all kinds of things. Whatever was the easiest and cheapest. I was—

MATSEN: Do you remember what you'd make? Can you give me some, some of the things?

ROBERTS: Oh, I remember my husband loved tapioca pudding. He did till the day he died. He asked me—

MATSEN: How about with your grandmother? Do you remember Christmas with your grandmother?

ROBERTS: No, I never cooked for my grandmother.

MATSEN: Christmas though. Do you remember a Christmas with your grandmother?

ROBERTS: Oh, no. We had [unclear]. It was something you put a lot of curds and wheys [unclear] and wrap it in towel, clean towel. And you boil it and it formed a crust. And it was good. I never made it.

MATSEN: But your grandmother made that.

ROBERTS: My grandmother. My grandmother did very little of that, too, because she wasn't young. My grandmother wasn't a young grandmother.

MATSEN: How about school? Do you remember school in Ireland? Do you remember going to school?

ROBERTS: Oh yes, Episcopal.

MATSEN: Tell me a little bit about school.

ROBERTS: I can remember one time when the teacher said [laughs] that everybody had to answer--. I think it was figures. I never was good at figures. I still am--. Can't even remember figures. [Laughs] The teacher said you're not going to the multiply table up to twelve. [Unclear] wanted to put their hand up first. Then they got to go home. And I thought, oh heck, I'm going to be here all day, all night. [Laughs] But I made a good guess and put my hand up. [Laughs] And I was right.

MATSEN: Well, that's good.

ROBERTS: That's what I remember that.

MATSEN: Do you remember any friends that you had in grade school?

ROBERTS: Well, we really--. We really had a master. You see we didn't have like a principal. We had a master. And I--. You didn't even turn your head. You were supposed to march in file, you know, and be very--. And I must have turned my head [unclear] probably tried to talk because the teacher sent me to the master. Scared to death. And he had a great big cane. And he said, put out your hand and I did,

scared to death. And he put a chocolate on my hand. And he said, you eat that and don't dare tell your teacher what I did. [Laughs]

MATSEN: Well it sounds like he was a nice man.

ROBERTS: Oh, no. I really liked my school over there. Not after I came here. We had a terrible teacher.

MATSEN: Well what--. Why don't you tell me a little bit about coming to America? Who decided to come to America?

ROBERTS: Oh my aunt.

MATSEN: Tell me that story.

ROBERTS: She was crazy to get to America. My uncle had been here for several years. He was a very, very loveable man.

MATSEN: What was he doing here?

ROBERTS: He was a bricklayer. He was a builder. He was very good but evidently never--. He was not [unclear]. She didn't know that. And probably wasn't--. It was a very unhappy year the whole thing because she got sick. She had his baby. And the baby that I loved and still do. I always said she was my first baby because my aunt was carried out on stretchers. I was twelve years old.

MATSEN: Do you remember the ship's name that you came on?

ROBERTS: Do what?

MATSEN: The name of the ship that you came on.

ROBERTS: Furnessia.

MATSEN: What did it look like?

ROBERTS: I didn't see much of it because I was seasick all the way over.

MATSEN: Do you remember getting to the ship? How did you get to where the ship was docked?

ROBERTS: You mean to take it? We went to [unclear]. We didn't sail from Belfast. We had to go to [unclear].

MATSEN: How'd you get there?

ROBERTS: My uncle, my grandfathers. My grandmother's eldest son came from [unclear] and he took us in a cab. None of them ever wanted my aunt to come. My grandmother didn't, of course, want her to come. My grandmother died short, a few months after we came to America. They didn't want my aunt to come. And her brother didn't want her to come. Nobody wanted her, but my grandmother had a funny idea. My grandmother's father came here and never went, came back home. [Laughs] But it—

MATSEN: Did your grandmother want you to come to America?

ROBERTS: Well, she thought it was my best bet. She didn't know what to do. And my Aunt Mary Jane would have kept me because she had a daughter six months younger. And that daughter had had some kind of sickness that left her with a high [unclear]. Didn't have much prospect of living—

MATSEN: What was her daughter's name?

ROBERTS: Margaret, Maggie. And her and [unclear] didn't live. But she would have taken me because we were very good friends, you see. She was about six months younger than I and so--. But I would have liked to live there. In fact, I was closer to my aunt. But my aunt was never very [unclear]. And not like I was to my grandmother. I had too much—

MATSEN: Now when you were on the ship, what do you remember about that?

ROBERTS: About what?

MATSEN: Being on the ship.

ROBERTS: Oh yes. We had a little stateroom. And it had--. I know it had to have three bunks because I had one and my aunt had one and I had one. I had one on the lower. And they had little bunks, you know, that were up. And we had this little Scotch stewardess, a real cute little woman. And she brought up our meals. My aunt and I never got out of bed. I was happy go lucky. In fact when they almost--. One time they brought it in and [unclear]. See we were coming over here in January in the winter. And it wasn't like it is today. It took ten days. But—

MATSEN: Do you remember being cold?

ROBERTS: They couldn't--. With children they [unclear] because she was running all over the ship. And she was afraid of nothing. I was afraid of everything. I was upset. And, of course, my grandmother--. And I'd heard all my uncle, too. [Laughs] This heathen country where the Indians come out and scalp you or the earth opens up and swallows you. [Laughs] And that's all I thought about. It was a--. To me I had no desire to come to America. But my aunt had wanted to come all her life. And too bad. She never got to see as much of it. I've seen a lot of it.

MATSEN: So it turned out well in the end.

ROBERTS: I am really been awful sorry that my aunt didn't live to see more of it.

MATSEN: Do you remember what you brought with you? Do you remember what you brought with you on the ship?

ROBERTS: Yeah. I remember one trunk.

MATSEN: One trunk? What did bring in the trunk?

ROBERTS: Because I was left to stand guard over it while she went somewhere. And then somebody came up, you know, wanted to know what was in it. They were taking [unclear]. And I told them a sewing machine. And [laughs] she said they said what kind and I said Singer. Well it was a Singer sewing machine. And he said [unclear] because Singer was making them right here in this country. They had to ship them there. There wasn't anything shipped in. And that was all they did about it. [Unclear]

MATSEN: So you brought the sewing machine.

ROBERTS: Yeah.

MATSEN: How much clothes did you bring with you?

ROBERTS: Oh I don't know. I suppose we brought--. My aunt would probably bring. I didn't pay it much attention.

MATSEN: Was there anything that you really wanted to bring with you?

ROBERTS: Nothing. I was--. I didn't want to come here.

MATSEN: You didn't even want to bring yourself.

ROBERTS: No. And when we landed and I looked at the people all standing around and I'd heard about this great wealth in America. And they weren't dressed any better than all the kids I'd played with. And I thought, heck, I sure don't know where--. I-- . My grandmother wouldn't have put one of those tammy shanters for a hat on me. [Laughs]

MATSEN: Do you remember seeing the Statute of Liberty, the Statue of Liberty?

ROBERTS: No, I don't. I don't remember that. I do remember getting into that hall and thought I was never going to get out of there.

MATSEN: At Ellis Island? This is at Ellis Island, the hall.

ROBERTS: You know I think on that same boat that we came over on there must have been an awful lot of Italians that came over on the Furnessia at that time about the time we came. Because this place was full, and I suppose it was Italians. But I had never heard anything spoken but English language. And I had never heard so many people talking in a foreign language. And they [unclear]. They, they would close up unless there was only one young Englishman. And I wish we had kept track of him. I'd like to know what happened because he was one young Englishman came over on that boat and he got shut in there with us, too. And he came over to my aunt and he said, I hear here's a whole boat of Indians coming in. [Laughs] He must have the same notions that I did. And he said his uncle was waiting for him on the dock when the boat landed. And he did not know why he should be in there. Well my aunt didn't know. Because my uncle had a house all furnished. And there was no reason, you know, why she--. Look how they let them in today. And they checked you for vaccination and everything. You had to have a doctor's exam issued before you got off the, the boat.

MATSEN: What is that noise?

ROBERTS: Now look at it.

UF: Ice cream truck.

ROBERTS: Ice cream—

MATSEN: We have an ice cream truck going by just for the tape so that they know what that is. So how old was this Englishman? Do you remember what he looked like at all?

ROBERTS: Oh he might have been twenty, nineteen. You know he'd have to be over nineteen, maybe twenty.

MATSEN: Now you stayed at Ellis Island—

ROBERTS: And he, he was in there.

MATSEN: Do you remember what it looked like where you stayed at Ellis Island? Where did you sleep?

ROBERTS: Oh we went [unclear] with the women. I [unclear] with the men.

MATSEN: Where did you sleep though?

ROBERTS: Well they had another room that you went to. And there were bunk beds and one on top of the other. Well that was fine. Of course I was scared of everything. And my aunt was fixing the bottom bed. And there was a woman across from her. And, of course, she couldn't speak English. But she must have traveled some or knew, you know, more bad things than my aunt did because she'd try--. And my aunt could understand. But I couldn't understand anybody unless they spoke

English. [Laughs] She motioned to my aunt and told her to get up in the top bunk and to take her purse and take it with her. So, you know, my aunt--. Then my aunt tried to tell me that and tell me that it was quite all right. I sat up all night at the bottom bunk. The next morning--. I maybe slept. But I--. At any rate, the next morning then we all went down. And the tables were set beautifully. You got lovely meals. Nice white linen tablecloths, nothing you could find fault with that at all.

END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

MATSEN: Do you remember what you had to eat?

ROBERTS: No. I don't remember only one thing and that's an apple. And that's the funniest thing because if people would sit in the other side a man or, I think it was a man. And I, of course, wasn't eating and didn't care, didn't [unclear]. I'd say my cousin Vida was five years younger was really alert. And these were lovely apples. And she had taken hers off the table because everybody that sat down I guess. But I didn't take mine off the table. And this man across from reached over to take mine and my little cousin slapped his hand. And she said you can't have that. That's hers. And she took it off. [Laughs] So that's how I remember the apple. Otherwise I don't remember what we ate. But I do know it was well served and they were polite and nice. As we were going back up again there was an Englishwoman with three little children that had been on the boat, too. And I recognized her. I ran out after them to see somebody that I knew could [unclear]. I broke line because there was a great big colored woman keeping everybody in line like we're sheep. [Laughs] And I saw this Englishwoman at the table. They were just sitting. She must have been in another room somewhere with the little ones. I broke rank and ran to her. Didn't get a chance to talk to her because the

woman took me by the arm, took me back and I slapped her hand. [Laughs] But she didn't say a word, didn't touch me, you know. She just put me back in line. And then my aunt took hold of me. Well we get up in the room again. There he got in.

MATSEN: Do you remember seeing a doctor?

ROBERTS: Hmm?

MATSEN: Did you see a doctor at Ellis Island? Do you remember seeing a doctor?

ROBERTS: Not at Ellis Island. No. No doctor in house. The doctor was on the boat.

MATSEN: Oh, well tell me about that.

ROBERTS: He checked you as you got off the boat.

MATSEN: What did he--? What did he ask you?

ROBERTS: To see--. But we were already vaccinated. I guess they were afraid of smallpox or something at that time. Well it was, of course, a law in Ireland where you had to have the--. You had a very short time that you had to have a child vaccinated. So there must have been some danger of smallpox around at that time.

MATSEN: So he checked you on the boat, the doctor?

ROBERTS: No. He just checked to see that you had, were vaccinated. You know you had the mark. I guess they still have it. [Laughs]

MATSEN: So was it crowded at Ellis Island when you were there, crowded?

ROBERTS: Yes, it was crowded. The table was full and the room was full. I don't know if--. We got up in that room--. Oh, how we got there. When this Englishman came and

took--. I opened my mouth and started screaming. [Laughs] And the man that swept the floor came to me. And he evidently was an Irishman because he said what's the matter with the wee lass? [Laughs] And my aunt said, if we don't get out of here she's going to be sick. And I don't know how I'm going to be. And I don't know why we're here or what they're doing. And he said, well I'll tell you. You're just--. He patted me on the back and he said, you're just quiet there now. And I'm going to see somebody and ask them why you're in here. So he went away. And no sooner--. He wasn't gone very long until they came and called my aunt. My aunt's name and number whatever it was and we'd go up into this other room where all these men are sitting around a table. And they were examining young, I think a young Italian man. And his brother was sponsoring him into this country. Had bankbooks and everything to show. But they turned him down. And I thought, oh boy, we're going back home. [Laughs] And my aunt got up there. She didn't have to show a thing. Because when she opened her purse to show what letters she had and what she had in it, there must have been a letter there [unclear] table [laughs] because this one gets up and says, you can always trust an Irishwoman by her face, you know. Well they took us and put us on the train. And got us real good seats. And had a set--. We really got good treatment. And I can't say I was abused in any way on--. And then it started to fill up with all these people that couldn't speak English, the train, too.

MATSEN: Do you remember playing at all at Ellis Island with other children?

ROBERTS: Playing?

MATSEN: While you were on Ellis Island do you remember playing outside or playing with other children while you were there or did you just stay with your family?

ROBERTS: I stayed with my aunt. I didn't--. No, I didn't. A man came near me. I had a little cup that I carried all the way across that my grandmother had bought me. And I was getting a drink of water. There was a tap there. And he evidently wanted a

drink. And all he did was point to my cup. But as long as he opened his mouth and [unclear] I threw the cup at him.

MATSEN: Did you get the cup back?

ROBERTS: Oh, I broke it all to pieces. It was a little china cup. So [laughs] that was when I really--. No, my aunt had a bad time.

MATSEN: Where did the train take you?

ROBERTS: Well, then the young Englishman came up to my aunt and he said, if you get out, I saw my uncle standing waiting. And if you get out of here and get near a telephone will you please take his number and try to call my uncle? Evidently his uncle must have lived in New York or somewhere. He said because he was there. I saw him and he waved to me. And I don't know why--. He was almost as bad as I because he was sick. And there was a whole boat land of Indians coming in. And he was afraid of them. [Laughs] So [unclear]. It was a great life.

MATSEN: When you left Ellis Island where did the train take you?

ROBERTS: Watertown, New York.

MATSEN: And what type of a house or apartment or—

ROBERTS: It was a nice house. Had a basement. But it was outside--. Right now my sister, my cousin rather—but I always call her sister—and my niece. It is right now becoming a really nicest place in Watertown. But it wasn't at that time. It was all foreign. There was a few English people, not English. Americans born in America and families on our street. And we had, I think, a bedroom downstairs. I remember we had a great big bedroom upstairs. But then they sold the house and we had to move.

MATSEN: Why did they sell the house?

ROBERTS: Because it was--. I suppose they didn't want it anymore. And my uncle had been a stone mason, had done a lot of remodeling. He had built the basement so it would, you could almost stand in the basement. You know he finished it completely. Well the house was a lot more valuable. And when we moved into it we had no guarantee nor no, so we just had to move out and find another place. And we found [unclear]. He had made a new schoolhouse or something. I don't know what it was.

MATSEN: Was it far from the house?

ROBERTS: It was a long--. Well it was over the railroad, on the wrong side of the railroad tracks. That's why I say now it's a big--. It's the one that's booming according to what they tell me.

MATSEN: Now who lived in this house? Your uncle—

ROBERTS: My uncle and aunt and, and Vi and I at that time. Then my aunt afterwards had another baby.

MATSEN: What was that baby's name?

ROBERTS: Bingham. And my uncle had lost his leg.

MATSEN: How did that happen?

ROBERTS: He jumped--. He was coming into--. I don't know how you'd call it. Coming in sort of [unclear] or something, anyway, instead of staying awake. The only thing about it was they hadn't locked the doors when he should. Because [unclear]. He was taken to a Catholic hospital. And they took his leg off below the knee. And it

should have been taken off above the knee. But he didn't want it that way. And even his sisters tried to get him not to sign it. Well that family [unclear] has got enough money [unclear]. Not doing so well. My aunt should have known. That's what he tried to tell her too many years ago. And a bricklayer especially in the trades people. So loveable man, a good man. If they had to had—what do you call it, that's alcohol [unclear]. If they had have had that today he would, he'd have been all right because I'd have taken and he'd have gone. Even as young as I was. But my aunt never knew how to handle him. All she did was--. If she smelled [unclear] she said dry [unclear]. And if she just smelled a whiff on him she'd start an argument and then he'd go and get him some plastic. See he couldn't stand up. It used to make me so mad even as a little one. But you couldn't tell her. But I knew he would do things for me because--. I even had, got hold of a dollar somewhere. And I sent away for something I saw in a magazine that said it would, you know, stop it. And when I'd put it in his coffee or tea. And he caught me one day. He said that's what's making my tea taste so awful. [Laughs] He said, you know, I should wring your neck for putting something like that in. I said but I--. I said I spent a whole dollar for to do that, to get. I said you just don't know what you're doing to it. And he said, well--. He kissed me and he said, that's why I love my uncle. He said, since you spent the dollar for it, and I know you could have used it for yourself, I'm going to take it. And do you know he took that darn stuff. It didn't do him any—

MATSEN: Didn't help.

ROBERTS: No, didn't do it. But that's why I know Alcohol Anonymous would. In fact I know because after my second son came back from the service he became an alcoholic.

MATSEN: And that helped him.

ROBERTS: And I knew it the minute he got home. His wife didn't drink. And I said--. She thought I was the narrow magnet. She even told me--. She apologized afterward. When I said--. Now my husband could take a drink and leave it. But I said no more liquor in this house. Every bit of it out it goes. My husband said, why. And I said because every time Jim comes into this house the first thing is does is go out there and look for a drink. And I said I've seen too much of that. And he said he's not drinking in my house nor no one else. So Jim comes in there and he looks in the cupboard. And he says, anything to drink? I said, yes there is. There's plenty of cold drinks in the refrigerator, plenty of milk, anything you want. And he said no liquor. And I said no and you're to blame for it. I said right now you should stop drinking.

MATSEN: Well that's a very strong thing to say.

ROBERTS: And his wife said, oh mother, leave him alone. He's celebrating out getting home. Oh yes, she, she didn't know. She'd never seen it like I had. You watch it. I don't like--. I still don't like to see anybody drinking. Not that I didn't used to be able to take a drink but I, I don't think I'd ever--. Maybe I could be an alcoholic. I don't know. I've never—

MATSEN: Well, Mrs. Roberts, why don't we get back to a little bit of an earlier time. Can you describe when you were living in America and you were living with your aunt and your uncle? Can you describe for me a holiday? What was it like Christmastime?

ROBERTS: The first Christmas that I was in America?

MATSEN: Sure, tell me about that one.

ROBERTS: There was no gifts. There was no hanging up stockings because there was no money. One of my uncles [unclear] at that time was living in Schenectady. And he sent my cousin a doll. He probably thought I was too big for one. He had only

boys. And maybe his wife bought it. I don't know. My uncle took one look at me and he sent me a Christmas card. My uncle [unclear] stove. We were burning coal. [Unclear] He went dropped it in the fire. He walked all the way to over that bridge into Watertown. And where he must have got it I don't know. But he got some money somewhere. And he came home and gave me a silk scarf. You see why I love my uncle?

MATSEN: I think I can understand why.

ROBERTS: Right to the day he died I loved my uncle. Now I never was that close to my aunt. She was the blood relative.

MATSEN: What was your uncle's name? I'm not sure if we got that.

ROBERTS: Isabelle.

MATSEN: Your uncle.

ROBERTS: Oh, my uncle. Bingham.

MATSEN: Bingham.

ROBERTS: Um-hmm. Oh, they're tracing that family. That's the one she's related to.

MATSEN: Polly.

ROBERTS: Polly. [Laughs] Polly is tracing family history, too.

MATSEN: So you'll have both sides of the family traced. What can you tell me--? How long did you live with your, with your aunt and your uncle? When did you meet your husband? When did you move out of the house?

ROBERTS: I met my husband when I was sixteen and married him.

MATSEN: How old were you when you got married?

ROBERTS: Seventeen, I wasn't eighteen yet. [Laughs]

MATSEN: How did you meet him?

ROBERTS: Church. I went to Sunday school every Sunday. It was a branch of the Presbyterian church.

MATSEN: Was it close to your house where you lived? Was the church close to your house?

ROBERTS: Yeah. We could walk to it. And I went to church. Every Sunday we went to Sunday school. My aunt [unclear] from this church.

MATSEN: Did you uncle go?

ROBERTS: Oh once in a while he did. And he'd go if I asked him [unclear]. He was, he was a good man. God knows [unclear] him. And—

MATSEN: So you met your husband in church?

ROBERTS: Uh-uh. He asked one of his cousins to introduce me. And she well if you want to meet her you'll have to go to church. Well, he, he did go to church. He didn't go very often after. [Laughs]

MATSEN: After you'd met?

ROBERTS: He'd go to church. About the last--. Well, do you know, my husband [unclear]. I was lucky. I was very lucky. I couldn't have met a better man.

MATSEN: Can you tell me about your wedding? What do you remember about your wedding?

ROBERTS: My Uncle Ted if I got married we asked him. My husband didn't try any, you know, go under board way. But he knew it. And I had an engagement ring. And I was going to marry, get married. And my uncle said if you do I'll break your legs and keep you home. [Laughs] You know that was the way he--. Well, I was married by the Presbyterian minister all nice and legal in, not in the church, in [unclear] home.

MATSEN: Now where was this that you were married?

ROBERTS: At my husband's cousin or somebody's, some relative of—

MATSEN: At their home?

ROBERTS: Um-hmm. And there was--. I had a bridesmaid, a friend, as the head maid.

MATSEN: What was her name?

ROBERTS: Eda Dance. Later she was--. She was already married to a fellow named Fred Stansberry. And there was quite a few. My mother-in-law made the wedding cake. And made the dinner. And she was--. They were living out in the country.

MATSEN: How many people were at the dinner?

ROBERTS: And we all went down there and--. I know there was quite a crowd. [Unclear] My Sunday school teacher went. [Laughs]

MATSEN: What did you have for dinner?

ROBERTS: I don't know.

MATSEN: You don't remember?

ROBERTS: I just know that my mother-in-law made the cake. And it was nice when I think of it.

MATSEN: And where was your house? Where did you move after?

ROBERTS: Well my husband had a little apartment.

MATSEN: So you moved into the apartment?

ROBERTS: We had that. Well he was working and he wasn't--. He never liked what he done. And of course I didn't either. Nothing wrong with [unclear] just me. And he wanted to go back to Ohio. See that was where he graduated from high school. And he knew a lot of people in Ohio. And he wanted to go back to Ohio. Well he could get a chance--. And I didn't know what a dangerous chance it was. To work on the railroad. So I found out afterwards what, whatever he was doing it can [unclear] from one guy to another, you know. I'd have been worried sick. And any way, as soon as he got enough money--. I stayed in a little apartment until. And then I met my cousin because my aunt wouldn't allow any of them to come near me. [Laughs]

MATSEN: Why?

ROBERTS: Because I went off and got married.

MATSEN: Okay.

ROBERTS: She was insulted by the whole thing. [Laughs] But any rate, when he got a paycheck he sent me--. I didn't know he'd sent me all of the money. But we had-- . That was one Christmas I couldn't buy anybody anything. And then along comes this check. So I bought everybody something [laughs] and spent it. I didn't know that he sent me the whole, his whole thing. Well at any rate he came halfway and met me because he got a pass you see. And as they went through the train selling all the stuff he bought all the stuff that [unclear] and we had a good time. [Laughs] And then when he got off the train he said to me, how much money have you got? I said I haven't got any money. [Laughs] Thank goodness he had taken a room so that we had a place to sleep. And she was an Irish Catholic, the woman that we had to room from. She was a very good woman. I'm sorry about her.

MATSEN: So where was that? That was in Ohio?

ROBERTS: In Ohio.

MATSEN: Where in Ohio?

ROBERTS: [Unclear]

MATSEN: How long did you live there?

ROBERTS: Well, let's see. There's something wrong there. We got into Cleveland. And we lived at that, that woman's house. And we moved into a little apartment [unclear] our own bathroom and a bedroom and a kitchen and a little sitting room my husband had found. So we lived most of our lives in Cleveland till we came to California. And on 82nd Street. [Laughs]

MATSEN: What can you tell me about how many children did you have?

ROBERTS: Five.

MATSEN: Can you tell me their names?

ROBERTS: I had four boys, one dead. Two boys and a girl and two more boys.

MATSEN: What were their names, what are their names?

ROBERTS: Frank, Tim—

MATSEN: That's okay. We can talk about another subject. How about coming to America? Are you happy that you came here after all of the not wanting to come in the very beginning?

ROBERTS: I was very happy after I got married.

MATSEN: Good.

ROBERTS: I don't say that we always lived in peace. Sometimes we could have killed each other. [Laughs] But I was very lucky and I'm very glad I came to America even though I'm much better--. Though I think the people in Ireland [unclear] came just as much stay at home from what Bobby tells me.

MATSEN: I think you're right in some cases. Yes.

ROBERTS: But, no, my aunt would have been a lot of better off staying home. But she never got--. She loved America. She even went away across town to see some movies, you know, that [unclear] before she came here. And when I think of it now, and think of all we got, and think of her. You know I used to get mad at her. But when I think of the fact that she never got to see any of it—

MATSEN: And you got to see it.

ROBERTS: Oh, I did. I got to the Adirondacks and got all over the--. I had a very interesting husband.

MATSEN: Mrs. Roberts, thank you very much for doing this interview with me. I'm signing off. This is Elysa Matsen on the fourteenth of September 1994 for the Ellis Island Oral History project. Thank you.

ROBERTS: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW