

EI-561/GILL

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DOROTHY FUCHS GILL

BIRTH DATE: MAY 21, 1899

INTERVIEW DATE: OCTOBER 27, 1994

RUNNING TIME: 30:18

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: PETER HOM

INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND RECORDING STUDIO

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED AND REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.,

4/1998

CLERK TYPIST AT ELLIS ISLAND:

1918-1919

SIGRIST: Good morning, this is Paul Sigrist for the National  
Park Service. Today is Thursday, October 27th,  
1994. I am at the Ellis Island Recording Studio  
with Mrs. Dorothy Gill. Mrs Gill was a clerk-  
typist here at Ellis Island. She came in  
January of 1918 and she left the position in 1919.  
Anyway, thank you for coming here. And can we  
begin, Mrs. Gill, with you giving me your birth  
date, please.

GILL: I was born May 21st, 1899.

SIGRIST: And where were you born?

GILL: In Port Chester, New York.

SIGRIST: Can you give me a little family background, a little information about your parents?

GILL: I went to business school and we never went to school in the afternoon. We went to Broadway to see the good movies. We never missed any. But one time we had no place to go. We had seen all the movies and went down to the Customs House because they were having a, (she pauses) civil service exams. The other, the group I was with all passed both typing and shorthand but I only passed the typing. In Janu--, in, then the Armistice was signed and in Janu--, in December I received a notice that if I would like a position at Ellis Island I could have it. My father brought me over, as he was an immigrant at Ellis Island in 1863 [sic, Ellis Island opened in 1892], and wanted to come over to see the island again. I was placed in the office of both the adjutant and commanding officer, and did the typing for both.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit, you said your father was an immigrant, can you just tell me a little bit

about your family background, your parents' history.

GILL: My father came from Germany in the 1800(s) and as he was a baker, he started a bakery in Port Chester and was very successful there.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

GILL: His name was John Joseph Fuchs...

SIGRIST: Can you...

GILL: F-U-C-H-S.

SIGRIST: Thank you. (Mrs. Gill laughs) Which would be your maiden name.

GILL: Which was my maiden name.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

GILL: And my mother's name was Margaret Braun.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Braun, please?

GILL: B-R-A-U-N. And my father boarded at her, at the Braun house in those days and eventually married.

SIGRIST: Where was your mother born?

GILL: My mother was born in the west somewhere, but I don't know where.

SIGRIST: But in the United States?

GILL: In the United States.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what it was like to grow up with an immigrant father.

GILL: It was very happy growing up because we had, he was very successful and we had everything that we needed. But, as most foreigners, he learned the American, the English language but always had the accent. They never loose the accent. But we were all very, very happy.

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SIGRIST: You say we. Were there brothers and sisters?

GILL: My, my brothers. I had three brothers and one sister.

SIGRIST: Can you name everybody for me?

GILL: My sister was Gretchen, Gretchen Slagle. My three  
brothers, one was Charles, one was Joseph and one  
was Augustus.

SIGRIST: And Slagle was your sister's married name.

GILL: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: And how do you spell Slagle?

GILL: S-L-A-G-L-E...

SIGRIST: Great.

GILL: ...was my sister.

SIGRIST: Tell me, tell me how you decided to go to business  
school.

GILL: The reason I went to business school, I was a slow reader, which, and today they had, I got, have good teachers. They have classes for the slow readers but in those days you either read or you didn't. I went back to high school hoping to graduate with my class but did not have history points. And when I went back, the principal said I would have to read three books, history books, and I said, "No way." So my father took me to New York and enrolled me in Miller's Business School.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where Miller's Business School was?

GILL: Miller's Business School was down about, I think it was on 19th Street in New York City.

SIGRIST: Was this a common thing for young ladies to do?

GILL: I knew nothing about New York City and that was the reason that my father brought me to New York. He gave me five cents and a commutation book and said that when I get out of school to get on the trolley, which was on, I think it was, well, the trolley

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would go right to Grand Central. And the commutation book would take me to Port Chester. And that is how I commuted.

SIGRIST: And you did that once you worked at Ellis Island, too? Did you, you lived with your parents?

GILL: And, and then when I started at Ellis Island, I would walk to the station about a half a mile to get the train about seven o'clock in the morn--, seven thirty in the morning, got on the subway at Grand Central, came down, all the way down to 14th Street, changed there and got on another subway and then changed to a little subway, which took me to Bowling Green. Then I got on the boat and that brought me over to Ellis Island. But it passed the Statue of Liberty every morning and, believe it or not, I never got off the boat to see the Statue. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: That's a long trip to go every morning.

GILL: Every morning and every night, but it was a happy trip.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit, before we start talking about Ellis Island, tell me a little bit about what New York City was like at the time of World War One. What, what was being in New York like for you at that time?

GILL: Well, New York was, had, was all army, army and navy. And we would, after school or at lunchtime we would walk to 23rd Street where the Army Band would be playing. And, of course, that was a good time, especially at that age. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Tell me about what your first day was like at Ellis Island. What happened on the first day of work?

GILL: My first day of work. Well, my first day, of course my father brought me over and he met Captain Marsden. Captain Marsden brought me in to meet Major Clark and Major Hague [ph]. And that first day I looked out the big window, which was where the big boats stopped and unloaded shell shocked soldiers and wounded soldiers. And I don't think I slept for weeks after that because I had never seen such an,

such excitement. However, I soon got over it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you were wearing on your first day of work?

GILL: In those days young people, young girls would wear skirts almost to their ankles, and nice white blouses. Niceorget crepe blouses that you could see through. (she laughs) But we survived.

SIGRIST: Did you have to wear some kind of a uniform when you worked at Ellis Island?

GILL: No, no.

SIGRIST: No. Where, do you remember where your desk was?

GILL: My desk was to the left of the front door coming in the main building. That was Major Clark's office. Next to that was Major Hague's [ph] office. He was the commanding officer of the detachment.

SIGRIST: And branch of the military did they work for?

GILL: And they worked in the medical and on every nice, older, regular sergeant used to come in every morning and pat me on the back and say to me, "Don't you think that Sergeant Gill is the nicest guy on the island?" And I would say, "Well, I guess he is. But I think there are a lot of nice guys on the island." I never met Major Gill (correcting herself), or Sergeant Gill rather, was in charge of passes and entertainment. And, of course, this older sergeant thought he was pretty nice. And he, he also thought that I pretty nice. He used to say he thought the nicest girl on the island should give the nicest guy on the island a break. But I never met Sergeant Gill all the time, most of the time I worked there. I knew who he was but we never had much conversation. But they had a dance every week on Saturday night, and I would go to the dance every Saturday night but never had a dance with Sergeant Gill. However, the last dance Sergeant Gill came over and asked if, he said that we should at least have the last waltz together and that was the beginning of our romance. The last waltz. Then I was transferred at the, I was transferred to the War Risk Insurance...

SIGRIST: What is the name?

GILL: The War Risk Insurance at 280 Broadway, which was then, which is now Veteran's, Veteran's Insurance. I worked there for a short while, then was transferred to the, the (she pauses) Transportation.

SIGRIST: Well, we should, before we get on to what happened later, let's talk more about Ellis Island.

GILL: Yes.

SIGRIST: You said they had a dance every Saturday night.

GILL: Yes.

SIGRIST: Was that on the island?

GILL: On the island, sure.

SIGRIST: Can you describe one of these dances for me? For instance, who came to the dances?

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GILL: Well, all the, all the fellows came, oh, well,  
Sergeant Gill had to go to Broadway to get some of  
the entertainment, too. And we all went to  
the dance (she laughs), I guess all the fellows,  
that's all I can...

SIGRIST: Was it only for the employees or did...

GILL: The soldiers.

SIGRIST: The soldiers.

GILL: Just for the, just for the, for the, for the base, for  
the fellows that were here. And, of course, they  
all had girls, naturally. They all went to  
Broadway and brought the girls over, you know.

SIGRIST: You said that there would be live entertainment.  
What kind of entertainment?

GILL: Well, I don't know. I never, he used to have singers,  
a couple of, I really don't remember anything about  
the entertainment. Whether they had entertainment  
before, I don't remember that.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what your duties were while you worked here.

GILL: Well, my duties were just to type up discharges for the fellows that were here because, of course, the Armistice had been signed and the fellows were anxious to get home. And that was, they had to hire more typists to type up the discharges.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me, did you have any interaction with the, the soldiers who were here at that time.

GILL: Not much. I went out with a couple of them. I, one of, one of the lieutenants was up, up with my mother, I mean I invited him up to have dinner. And, of course, I invited Sergeant Gill up a couple of times after the Armistice, but Sergeant, well, okay...

SIGRIST: Where were the soldiers kept here on the island? Where did they stay?

GILL: I couldn't tell you. I didn't know too much about,

about, I stayed in my office most of the day and, of course, at lunchtime there was a couple of girls that we would walk around. We'd walk over for something to eat. There was a passway between the Island One [sic, presumably referring only to the northwest section of Island One as being a separate island, as explained in the following information] and this island [presumably the area of Island One covered by the main building] and the navy had the Island One, you know.

SIGRIST: It was strictly navy?

GILL: Yes. We weren't suppose to go any further.

SIGRIST: Oh, so you weren't allowed over there, then.

GILL: Oh, no. Oh, no. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Is that were the hospitals were?

GILL: (gesturing) No, the hospital that way [i.e. on Island Two], the navy was over that way. The hospital was over this way and I was in the middle.

SIGRIST: In the main building?

GILL: In the main building right here.

SIGRIST: You mentioned a, a Sergeant Mark, your, your, who was,  
who, Sergeant Hague [ph]? Or General Hague [ph]?

GILL: Major.

SIGRIST: Major Hague [ph].

GILL: Major Hague [ph].

SIGRIST: But, but the man underneath him you mentioned. Is his  
last name Mark?

GILL: Clark.

SIGRIST: Clark.

GILL: Major Ira, Ira Clark, Ira S. Clark.

SIGRIST: Was he, was he your supervisor?

GILL: Yes.

SIGRIST: He was your boss?

GILL: Yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me about him. What was he like as a person?

GILL: Oh, he was the nicest man. And he would come over. He never made me work very hard and he didn't work very hard either. (she laughs) He would come over and say, "Stick a paper in your machine." And I would put a paper in my machine and he'd say, "Type up what I'm saying." And that's, then I think he went to bed (she laughs) after that. I shouldn't say that but I didn't see much of him. I mean, he would come in. He was just the nicest person.

SIGRIST: Were there other young ladies employed here at that time?

GILL: Well, there was a regular, uh, down in Captain

Marsden's office, that was a regular stenographic office. I really don't know much. I didn't wander around too much. I stayed pretty much, I stayed put pretty much where I was. And I had one girlfriend. We'd go out and have, have, get our sandwich or our lunch halfway between the navy and the army.

SIGRIST: Where were, where did you eat? When you got your lunch, then where did you take it to eat?

GILL: I think we used to walk around and eat it. I know one time we, in fact I had a picture. I was going to bring it, too. This one girl, she was a real typical Irish and she and I walked in the back and we were thirsty. Sergeant Gill went in to get me a drink and what was in it but a dose of salts. (she laughs) And I flung it at him and that ruined his suit. (she laughs) But that, but that didn't make any difference.

SIGRIST: Tell me...

GILL: (laughing) You don't have to put all those nasty

things in there. (Mr. Sigrist laughs)

SIGRIST: You mentioned a Morrison, Sergeant, is it Sergeant Morrison?

GILL: (correcting Mr. Sigrist) Marsden, M-A-R-S-D-E-N.

SIGRIST: And what was his position here?

GILL: I don't know, really. He was head of the, I, I really don't know. But he was the officer that we had to see when I first came in. Now what his position was, I don't know.

SIGRIST: How did your father, being an immigrant himself, feel about you going to Ellis Island every day?

GILL: Oh, he was tickled to death. he was happy because he wanted to see, and he and Captain Marsden seemed to have an awful lot in common. I don't know what, but they were talking for a long time together.

SIGRIST: Do you know what year your father came to America?

GILL: 1863.

SIGRIST: That's when he came or is that when he was born?

GILL: Now, he came to, it was either 1863 or 1868. I may  
have it on this (referring to papers she had with  
her)...

SIGRIST: Yeah, we can check, we can check. Did they ever, did  
they ever supply like a Christmas party for you at  
the holidays?

GILL: No, no. Well, you see, it was after Christmas.

SIGRIST: (a pause) Just for the sake of the tape, Mrs. Gill is  
looking at her papers. Well, we, we can check it  
after.

GILL: Yeah, we'll check it after.

SIGRIST: Yeah, we'll check it after. Did you like working  
here?

GILL: Oh, I loved it. (she laughs) Who wouldn't, at that

age? (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What was the best part? What did you enjoy the most about working here?

GILL: Just everything. I can't tell you, I mean, at that age and I have a position like that. It was quite a, quite a, quite a thing. However, I will tell you one thing. I've always been disappointed that in, nowhere and nobody knows that Ellis Island was a, was a hospital, debarkation hospital, number one. I have told so many people and they didn't, they never knew it was a hospital. Never knew that it was, that the army was here. In fact, this is a, well, a letter that I wrote (she holds the letter) after my husband died, when they showed the movie of Ellis Island. Do you remember about ten years ago? Well, I wrote. I sent a donation in my husband's, in memory of my husband. And that's what I put on there. I said that I, the movie was all right and everybody had someone coming from Ellis Island but as yet I have to meet someone who knew that it was a hospital, or that the army was there. And that's, that's something. In fact, that's

in that letter, too.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that your husband-to-be, Sergeant Gill, was in charge of passes. What does that mean, exactly? What were his duties here?

GILL: Well, if a fellow wanted to go off the island for the day or the fellow wanted, wanted a weekend, he would have to, I suppose, look up his record and then have to make up a pass and take it in to Major Hague [ph] or Major Clark, one or the other.

SIGRIST: How long did your husband work here, your husband-to-be at that time? Did he work here for a short amount of time or a long time?

GILL: He was in about, about a year, I guess, before, yeah. Isn't that funny, I, yeah, well, I'll tell afterward.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollections of the immigration part of the island? Was there any immigration going through that you know of at that time?

GILL: Not a bit that I know of. I don't see how it could be when they, both army and navy were here.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that you remember seeing wounded soldiers.

GILL: Oh, yes. I saw, right off of, I was sitting right at the, at the desk and here they came right, oh yes.

SIGRIST: Was that a frequent occurrence here? Were wounded brought here frequently?

GILL: Not too, no. You see, I was only here, not too long. From January until, I don't know, how long was it? About a year, half a year, less than a year.

SIGRIST: You were not allowed on any other part of the island except for where you had to be.

GILL: Right, right.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any organizations that had offices on Ellis Island? Were there any other kinds of organizations that had offices here?

GILL: Nothing that I know of.

SIGRIST: Just the military.

GILL: The Red Cross were here all the time but I don't know whether they had offices or not. Not that I know of.

SIGRIST: But there were representatives of the Red Cross.

GILL: Oh, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Was there anyone here that you worked with that you didn't like?

GILL: (she pauses) Yes. (she laughs).

SIGRIST: And who was that?

GILL: Well, I don't know who he was but whatever, whenever we were coming through from the other side, you know, through that tunnel, not a tunnel but the walkway, he would, he, well, he was older and he

thought he was smart. He would always come with his arms outstretched and he thought he was smart. (she laughs) Well, I, I don't know what his name was but I did not like him.

SIGRIST: Well, he wouldn't be able to get away with that nowadays. (he laughs)

GILL: Yeah, well, he got away, he thought he did.

SIGRIST: You, you said that when you left Ellis Island you went to work back in Manhattan. Did you ever come back out to the island for any reason after you left it?

GILL: Never. This is my first time back. And that was a long time ago.

SIGRIST: Yeah, seventy five years ago, yeah. When you left, did they give you any kind of a party or a good bye?

GILL: No, no, nothing. It was just the last dance and that was it. Then we were, that was it.

SIGRIST: And then later, of course, you married Sergeant Gill.

(Mrs. Gill laughs) Do you remember what year you got married?

GILL: 1920.

SIGRIST: So soon after you left you married.

GILL: Well, about a year afterward. Well, you see, he had quite a, he went to this one horse town and, of course, Broadway was in, he had a taste of Broadway and liked Broadway. And we went to the Victory Hut up at Times Square and asked the Red Cross woman if there were any jobs for veterans. And she said, "Well, Mr. Randolph Hearst just called up and said if there was a desk, any veteran could have it." And he was the lucky man.

SIGRIST: So he went to work for Hearst.

GILL: And he worked there for forty three years.

SIGRIST: In our last couple of minutes, can you name your children for me?

GILL: My, we were married for sixty two years and had two lovely, girls, daughters. One is Mrs. (she pauses)....

SIGRIST: Just their first names is fine.

GILL: (laughing) Mrs., isn't that awful.

SIGRIST: Well, Dorothy's with you today.

GILL: Yeah, I wanted to get the oldest one first.

SIGRIST: Okay.

GILL: Shirley Evert, E-V-E-R-T, and the other is Dorothy, Mrs. Dorothy Briamley, B-R-I-A-M-L-E-Y. One is living in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina and one living in Cumberland, Rhode Island, outside of Providence.

SIGRIST: And how many grandchildren?

GILL: And...

SIGRIST: Quickly, how many grandchildren? How many?

GILL: Three and four. Seven grandchildren.

SIGRIST: Any great grandchildren?

GILL: And nine great grandchildren.

SIGRIST: Wow. In our last minute, how do you think about your  
life now? When you look back over everything  
you've done, how do you, how do you think about  
your life?

GILL: I have had a very happy life. My husband and I both  
were very compatible and a few years before he,  
twenty years before he died we built a lovely summer  
place up at Cape Cod. But I still live in our first  
home in Port Chester, which we built in 1923.

SIGRIST: And in the town that you grew up in, too.

GILL: Yes.

SIGRIST: Well, Mrs. Gill, I want to thank you very much. This

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has been most interesting.

GILL: (referring to her papers) Well, there may be a lot of  
different things in there...

SIGRIST: Well, we'll, we'll take a look at the papers that  
you've got after we complete the interview.

GILL: Yeah, okay.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Dorothy Gill on  
Thursday, October 27, 1994 at the Ellis Island  
Recording Studio. Thank you, Mrs. Gill.