

EI-570

FULL NAME: EDWARD GEORGE EYLES
BIRTHDATE: JUNE 18, 1913
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AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 81
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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE
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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: RACHEL SMITH
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

WALES, 1920
AGE: 7

SHIP: MAURITANIA
PORT: SOUTH HAMPTON
RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. And I'm here today. It's November 21, 1994. I'm here with Edward George Eyles, who is, we are at his home on River Street in Pitchburg, [ph] Pitchburg, Massachusetts. Mr. Eyles came from Wales in 1920 when he was seven years old. And I'd like to start by saying I'm very happy to be here and I'm looking forward to hearing this. Tell me first your birth date and where in Wales you were born.

EYLES: Well I was born on June 18, 1913 at 42 Phillip Street, Bobinash [ph], South Wales, Goodmorgon county, England.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

EYLES: And my mother said I was born at nine o'clock in the morning.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did your mother ever say anything else about your birth? I mean, was there any kind of hints, family legend about your birth?

EYLES: No. I was the youngest one of four boys. And we were all born in the same house.

LEVINE: Oh.

EYLES: And uh, the house backed up to the school that I went to.

LEVINE: What was the, um, what were your brothers' names?

EYLES: My oldest brother was Ernest Junior. The next one was Thomas Henry. And the next one was David Alfred. And we were all approximately two years apart.

LEVINE: And your mother's name?

EYLES: My mother's name was Margaret Ann Griffiths, her maiden name. G-R-I-F-F-I-T-H-S.

LEVINE: And your father?

EYLES: My father's name was Ernest Eyles. And his father's name was Henry Eyles. And his father's name was William Eyles. But my father was born in Bath, England. And the whole family, his father and the family, thirteen children moved to Modern Ash [ph] following the coal mining industry.

LEVINE: Oh. Tell me what you know about the legend of your great-grandfather, grandfather, father as far as the mining industry's concerned.

EYLES: Well I know little about my grandfather Eyles, that's Henry Eyles. Cause as he died before I was born. My other grandfather, Grandfather Griffiths, he was a blacksmith. And he worked on what they call the topside of the collaries [ph] in the blacksmith shop, working on iron. Now he had sons, I think there were fourteen, fifteen in their family. And he had three sons that were blacksmiths that followed in his footsteps. They worked on top. My father went to work when he was ten years old, down in the mines. He used to be, uh, opening doors and closing 'em to direct the flow of air to get ventilation through the mine tunnels that time.

LEVINE: Ten years old. So he had quit school to work in the mines?

EYLES: Back in those days, as soon as you were old enough to work, you went to work. Yeah he quit school, though he did follow-up schooling afterwards because he wound up with, doing mining engineering.

LEVINE: Oh.

EYLES: Before he left England to come to the United States.

LEVINE: Were there any family stories or stories your father told about times in the mines?

EYLES: Uh, no. No, he was, he just want to get out. And uh, the only story I know, is my oldest brother Ernie, he got out of school and he was sixteen. He went to work in the mines. My mother didn't know it. So she was mad when she found out. That's when the decision was made to come to America. There were too many accidents in the coal mines. And they were getting black lung. So they decided not to stay there. They want to come out here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, how bout you? You went to school. When did you go to school and when did you stop and-?

EYLES: You start school there when you're three years old.

LEVINE: Really?

EYLES: Uh, I went to school for three years, honestly three and half years before we came to this country. Now my other brothers went to school up to eight. Ernest, which is the oldest, he was about sixteen. He had graduated from school over there, which is the same as high school graduation over here. It's about two years difference in the educational at that time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

EYLES: My brother Tom came out here. He was about fourteen. He had to go back to school, under what they call continuation school. So he worked for Manuel Maxwell Bullet Putnam Machine Tool. So he ended up training as machinist, [not understood]. My other brother, Dave, had to go back to school the way I did. And he dropped out when he was sixteen.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now tell me about school in Wales. What was that like?

EYLES: Well, it was, essentially the same as it is here. There was very little difference. You had the classrooms. In preschool I was in, well I guess you'd call it a K, almost a primary school, ya know. Cause I went there three years before I went up to the other school. The other school had eight-seven. And that one was almost like your, K 1-2 over here, kindergarten.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

EYLES: At our house, where I was born, on the back of it, butted up to the school yard.

LEVINE: The primary one?

EYLES: Yep. So, every once and awhile, I would get a boost over the wall down to the end of the garden into the schoolyard. If I was late to school.

LEVINE: (laughs) Do you remember your first day in school?

EYLES: Uh, no. Well wait a minute, I [not understood] you say no. The first [not understood] what you say around here, the first day in the class, they had a huge rocking horse there. And it used to hold six kids. They had basket seats between his front legs, baskets seats between his rear legs, and a saddle on top of him. The kids used to all get on that and it was a question of just playing and coloring. But yeah, then you moved from that one into the next grade. That's where you started to learn to do your addition, multiplication tables in that one.

LEVINE: Hmm.

EYLES: When I came out here, I was boosted a grade. I went to second grade over here instead of the first.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How bout religion? Was your family religious?

EYLES: Yeah, uh. The Church of England [not understood] My father was a deacon of the church. My mother was there. I, Grandmother, Grandfather Griffiths were Welsh. They went to the Welsh church. They used to sing all the hymns in Welsh. And on the other side, my grandmother, grandfather Eyles, they went to Episcopalian branch church.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now how did your mother and father meet? Because your mother was Welsh-

EYLES: Well my mother was Welsh but, uh, they meet like you do anyone else. If you're out, you go to church or something like that. I don't know exactly how they did meet, but-

LEVINE: So your father was already in Wales when he met your mother?

EYLES: Oh yes. They were all in Modenash [ph].

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

EYLES: They were in Modenash [ph] when they met each other. That's where they get married.

LEVINE: I see.

EYLES: In Modenash [ph] where they get married.

LEVINE: So, let's see, wha- and did you know your grandparents? You knew some, you knew-

EYLES: Oh yes. I knew my grandmother Eyles, as she was living. She died in 1926. Uh, my grandmother and grandfather Griffiths- I used to run away when I get mad at mother and I'd run to their house, which was the next street over and up a couple of houses. And my grandmother Griffiths always used to send, one of my aunts down to tell my mother where she was. So I stay overnight with them. And my grandfather used to smoke a pipe. My job was to make what we call spillswab [ph], which is, take newspaper and you roll it up on a knitting needle, a fine knit needle. You have a tube like a straw. And you used to use these to light his pipe from the fireplace.

LEVINE: Oh.

EYLES: You sit in front of the fireplace to light his pipe.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

EYLES: My grandmother used to have a three legged footstoll. She used to sit on it in front of the fireplace to keep herself warm in those days. Cause our house over there was- The flight to Phillips street where I was born had flagstone floors. Big square stones for floor. I could sit, there's [not understood] two down, two up. One we knew in each room. And you walk in the front door, the right hand side was living room that they used for funerals and weddings. The left hand side

was, you name it. You cooked in it, you ate in it, and you visited in it. As I remember seeing my brother David over there, at Christmas time. This must have been the year before we come out here, it would be about 1919, Christmas. We'd have a goose and they used to hang it from a crane in front of the fireplace on a string. And he'd turn it around, light a string up and you'd let it go and set a [not understood] with a spatula as it unwound to baste it in front of the fireplace.

LEVINE: Oh.

EYLES: Uh, that's where we put it. Each house had its own backyard and a garden where you grew vegetables. In addition to that, the correana [ph] allotted certain parts of land on the mountain side for the families to grow the vegetables. And, uh, my father had one up there. We used to do it. I won't tell you how I'd used to get the water for irrigating and stuff because I don't think that's suitable for this tape. (laughs)

LEVINE: Oh boy that sounds like stuff I want to hear. (laughs)

EYLES: (laughs) If you want to shut the tape off, I'll tell ya. (both laugh)

LEVINE: Does it have to do with um-

EYLES: Horse manure.

LEVINE: Yeah.

EYLES: Yeah. Horse manure water actually they call it cause he used to send my brother David out with a cart to pick up horse manure. And he'd used to put in burlap bags. And just guide it up the mountain. There was no running water of course. He'd have a couple of barrels running off of a tool shed he had up there. And he'd put these bags of manure in a barrel and the water runs off through the end of the barrel. And it would run down two or three barrels. He used to use that water to water his vegetables.

LEVINE: Oh.

EYLES: I don't know what you'd call that kind of gardening today, but- (both laughs). It was good fertilizer.

LEVINE: That's right, yeah.

EYLES: Cause he always took, always took prizes on everything he had- flowers, all of that.

LEVINE: Really?

EYLES: Yeah.

LEVINE: Huh. So, um, in these houses that went up the hill-

EYLES: Yep.

LEVINE: Just as the hill went, they went up. And there were two on, two rooms on top, two rooms on bottom.

EYLES: That's right. Then we had a lean-to kit, lean-to shed out back that some people used to call it the back kitchen.

LEVINE: And what did you do in the back kitchen? What did families do?

EYLES: Well, in my fam, in my place we had running water that came from the street, under the house, into the back kitchen and it was one cold water faucet. That was the water we had.

LEVINE: That was supplied by the city?

EYLES: That's right, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

EYLES: Supplied by the counsel (?), yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

EYLES: That was just one faucet that went through the back. And we had a stove out there, like the old black iron stoves they had here. We used to take a bath out there in a wooden tub. A hogs head tub that they'd bring in and put on the middle of the floor. That's where you'd have a bath. And in my father's case, he had all glass on the roof and on the side cause he was taking photography. He was photography as a sideline. And he'd used to grow tomatoes back there cause he had almost like a greenhouse effect. Tomatoes. And out beyond that in the backyard he grew vegetables. He had rabbits. And uh, in our instance, there was an outhouse down the end of the garden. But the outhouses was built over a brook.

LEVINE: Oh! (laughs) How funny.

EYLES: So uh, yeah, you didn't have to clean them out at all. There was a brook that ran down from the mountain, it went down to the river.

LEVINE: How funny, wow. And then most people had a little patch of, or a little, or big patch of land up on the hillside?

EYLES: Oh, I say from about my memory it might be about uh, fifty by a hundred feet. Something like that in my mind. Cause as a little kid, it was kind of [not understood] possibly.

LEVINE: Huh. So uh, was your father working as a photographer?

EYLES: No.

LEVINE: As well as-?

EYLES: No. He once worked as a photographer. That was as a hobby. He worked as a collie (?), a coal miner. That was his profession over there. Coal miner.

LEVINE: And so he was actually going into the mines and-?

EYLES: Going down underground.

LEVINE: Yeah.

EYLES: Mining coal. And over there some of the seams were about a foot and a half thick and some were six feet thick. And uh, this was all done by manual labor now. No coal cutting machines like they have today. Uh, cutting a seam about a foot, foot and a half thick, you laid on your side. That's when you pick sideways to loosen up the coal and pick it out. And they used to get paid so much for every ton of coal they dug.

LEVINE: Did your father ever say why he went from Bath, was it, England?

EYLES: Well this was his father moved over there.

LEVINE: Oh his father moved.

EYLES: His father took the family over because of the work. Cause this was uh, remember this was back before the turn of the century. Back in the 1800s. That's when the coal mining opened up in South Wales. They used to have iron mining a few miles north of where we were in Abadaya [ph]. Then they had the coal mining and people went there from all over. Highland and everywhere looking for work. That was his reason for going there. Cause he was a coal miner, he went down underground also.

LEVINE: Hm. Was Mount Ash, Mountnash, [ph] was that considered a good coal mine, I mean, by miners?

EYLES: Oh yes. (sighs) Oh when I grew up, the best coal in the world came from there. Back before, I'd say, before World War I. They had somewhere around, I think about, fifteen or twenty mines, coal mines in that same area.

LEVINE: Uh-hm.

EYLES: All in the valleys. They burned out the side of what they call now steam coal which is like [not understood] coal. That's what they dug out. They used to ship coal out of Cadif [ph] all over the world. Uh, time's changed. And all these things change. Now all the mines are shut down now. They have none there now.

LEVINE: I see. So you must have burned coal in your home?

EYLES: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. That was part of the wages. They'd give you the coal. And uh, well, uh, outside, except for the stove that

I mentioned in the back kitchen, we had an open fire. And it was an open grate. It was approximately a foot to a foot and a half wide. And it was all open. One side was a receptacle for hot water. The other side was oven. And by using dampers, chimneys you could direct the heat under the oven or under the hot water. To do your baking or your boiling and stuff. It was all open, every bit of it. And if you had a chimney fire, which you used to have very often, uh, you were penalized by the councilty [ph] came to put it out. Cause I remember my mother having a block of salt with a [not understood] salt in blocks. And she's scraping the salt on top of the fire to kill it when she had a chimney fire. I remember doing that.

LEVINE: Huh. Wait, let me pause here for one second. (break in tape) OK, we're resuming again now without the clicking noise. Um, a couple of things. You talked about the council. Now what does that mean?

EYLES: Well the council is almost like any town has (sneezes) a council here. City council where you elect members from different parts of the city.

LEVINE: Oh I see. So when you say the council, this was elected officials of a-

EYLES: Of the city.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

EYLES: That's right.

LEVINE: And did, were people mining salt anywhere near?

EYLES: No, no, no, no, no that came from the store.

LEVINE: Somewhere else.

EYLES: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Did the, so the coal mine, the people who owned the coal mine essentially headed the town. I mean, they were the-

EYLES: Well they were land owners.

LEVINE: Everyone there was, was really pretty much working for the coal mine. Is that right?

EYLES: That's right, yeah. Coal mine. That was the only industry in town to my, to my knowledge was the coal mines. They all worked for the coal mine. Outside there was regular shops, ya know, stores, railways ran through and things like that.

LEVINE: So, part of the wages were in coal.

EYLES: Yeah, they'd give you enough coal for all year.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

EYLES: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And is that the only difference then that would be from working anywhere else?

EYLES: That's all.

LEVINE: Yeah.

EYLES: Yep, the rest of the stuff you'd just get a regular paycheck.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And were people, were people by and large, was there any pride associated with the work in the mines there?

EYLES: Well anyone I think that goes to work has certain amount of pride in what they do. I don't know anything other than that. I was talking to my cousins over the years. There's nothing been mentioned about things like that.

LEVINE: Yeah. It's more the hazards of it and the hard-

EYLES: That's right.

LEVINE: Work of it.

EYLES: [not understood] I've heard my father talk to my uncles out here at certain times about how they used to be able to go down in a coal mine and they could walk for fifteen or twenty miles underground and come up in another valley somewhere. The way the levels were all interconnected. They did that for a reason. One of the reasons was if you had a fall in the mine, you could go in another way so you wouldn't be blocked in.

LEVINE: Hm. Were you ever aware of accidents when you were living?

EYLES: Well I heard of some. But this was just through talk in, through the family, ya know. My mother and father were talking. But there was one couple that came out here in the twenties that they knew. He'd been caught in a coal mine. [not understood] He went in with black hair and he came out his hair was white. From a reaction with the coal mine. They went down from here down to Pennsylvania. The coal mine around [not understood] and then they went back to England. They didn't like it out here.

LEVINE: Hm.

EYLES: Lot of people like that.

LEVINE: Interesting.

EYLES: Don't like it out here. (laughs)

LEVINE: What is it you think they object to or that they don't, that they like better elsewhere?

EYLES: Uh, living out here's too fast. Anyone that's sort of laid back type of living. They don't rush, hurry so much.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

EYLES: Everyone out here is chasing it all.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

EYLES: I think you know that too. (laughs) Oh and uh, when we, well see my father came out here in October. Now I believe it was October 1920, ahead of us.

LEVINE: That's right.

EYLES: And uh, he came to his brother who, well he just lived across the street from us, where we are right now.

LEVINE: Your father's brother did?

EYLES: Yep.

LEVINE: Oh.

EYLES: And I think they came out before, about 1913 or somewhere around that time. I'm not sure what time they came. And uh, they had a job for both of 'em. The Pitchford [ph] Paper Company. So then before we left over there, I, my father had a trunk made. He had it built from, the mine carpenter built it for him, with wheels on the bottom of it. And I remember my mother packing that and she had to bring her feather bed with her. I don't know if you've ever seen a feather bed but they're really something.

LEVINE: It looks like a great big comforter, right?

EYLES: (laughs) Yes, similar to it. But you knead it like dough to fluff it up. (laughs) Now she had that all wrapped up and tied up in a sack. Well, you've seen the pictures on Ellis Island. The way they have bundles. Well, that's the way she had her feather bed all wrapped up in a bundle like that, in a sack. And when we, uh, when we get over here, of course, I was too young to remember really seeing the Statue of Liberty that much. Say the skyline and that- and uh, we get in to New York the day before Christmas. Ellis Island was shut down. It was a holiday. Well my father had a pass so he could come on board ship at that time. I don't know how he did it. And Christmas morning all we had was a basket of fruit. So you can imagine what us kids felt like. (laughs) Christmas- Well when we get off the day after Christmas, I remember going through the hall. Some of it with my mother. They had some benches there, but most of the time we were standing up. And to me, they had wooden slat fences, like the snow fences they have here. And because I was a small kid, but I think they were about six or seven feet

tall. And we, we would talk to my father through the slats at that time. And when we came to go through the customs, they opened the trunk up, check everything. My mother had a lot of candy, English candy. And I know the inspector took one look at it. So my mother said "Go ahead, help yourself." So he took a couple of handfuls of candy. Uh, these were round tree clear gum, so I remember this distinctly because it came out of a metal can. 'Bout, almost a foot long, about eight or nine inches wide, three inches deep. It was full of these candies. I think it was about a five pound box. So he helped himself to that. And we get off of that and my father had booked us by overnight steamer from New York up into Providence, I believe it was. So, all six of us had to go that way to get to- then from Providence we transferred to train to come to Pitchburg [ph]. Now, coming over, we came over in December. We had two stops. One, off the Irish sea. And one off the coast of Newfoundland.

LEVINE: Where did you leave from?

EYLES: Uh, we left from South Hampton, I believe.

LEVINE: Ah.

EYLES: I wouldn't say I'd swear to that, but I think it was South Hampton.

LEVINE: And what was the name of the ship?

EYLES: I believe it was the Mauritania [ph] we came over on. We were allowed on the back deck and down below. They had signs up. We could not go up into the second class or the third class cabins. We came as, steerage.

LEVINE: Steerage.

EYLES: Type of deal, yes, yeah. And we were in a four bunk cabin. Now, my mother and the three younger boys were in the cabin. But the oldest boy went down into the, where they had the bunks down below in the, well almost like a dormitory affair. When my mother found out where he was and she saw it, she made him come up and stay in the cabin with us. So my brother David and I had to sleep in the same bunk. Now, in that cabin the washbasin was a fold-up type. It folded to, you had two bunks on each side of this. The washbasin folded up against the wall. And you dropped it down you had the faucet that your water went for washing up. And I remember my brother David, seasick. Boy, was he seasick! Both storms. He couldn't do a thing. He just laid there in the cabin all day long. Sick as a dog. As a matter of fact, he gets sick even today if he goes out on a boat. Can't help it. And my mother had brought, uh, a spoon, perforated spoon they used to hold tea leaves. She brought tea and biscuits with us so she could have a cup of tea in the afternoon in the cabin. And she got hot water from the stewardess to do that with. So, but we were pretty lucky I think. That they thought ahead the way they did.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

EYLES: Now, to get to back now where I said we came to Pitchburg [ph] by train. When we get here, you want to realize, it was winter. We're in short pants and knee socks, which is what we wore over there, at least I did. And that's what I wore over here for the first couple of weeks. I didn't feel the cold at all. I went sliding and everything. And when my mother took us shopping to get long winter underwear and long black stockings, we put up an awful fight. Because we did not want to wear girl stockings or long underwear. (both laugh). Now we stayed with my aunt and uncle down here. Now there was six of us and there was seven in his family. There was thirteen and they had a five room house. So we were kind of crowded. One bathroom. So you imagine what we, went forward there. And soon after that, my father get uh, a company house that had seven rooms in it. Four on the ground floor and three upstairs. So we moved into that.

LEVINE: Did you say that your father came to work at the paper mill?

EYLES: Right.

LEVINE: Now how, did he know somebody who worked there? Or how did he know about that?

EYLES: My uncle, his brother, knew the boss. And the boss, in these days now, the boss used to ask the workers if they knew anyone who wanted a job. And my uncle said yes, his brother would like to come over. So he had a job waiting for him when he came over here. And I think that might have been a little bit illegal, but-

LEVINE: I think it was.

EYLES: But that's the way they worked it. Now, the Cocker Burbank [ph] people here that ran the Cocker Burbank mills, they were the same way. The English and Scotch people were the best workers they ever had over here to work in the paper mills. And they'd, they'd hire them unseen because they knew they could depend on them. Now that's the way they worked this deal. So when my father came out in October he wanted to make sure he had the job before my mother and us four boys came over.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

EYLES: So he was settled down in that position. He was just waiting for a house and he had this house I think it was a couple of months after we got here. We moved into this, the other house.

LEVINE: Did your father feel like he had really made a good step in going from the coal mines to the paper mill?

EYLES: He did because he had rheumatism [not understood] in the coal mine. Plus the black lung, kneeled over, he was coughing all the time. Now he had, he was pretty bad with rheumatism when he came out here. I think in about two or three years, it was all gone because of the climate. And he wasn't underground. He wasn't working underground. So he made a good deal. And my mother thought she made a good deal because her four boys were not going to be coal mining. They were going to be

doing other things. Now, the oldest boy, Ernie, he wound up as superintendent of the paper company. My next brother Tom, he worked for Foster Grant [ph] plastic company. He was chief, in charge of all dye making and new products. He used to travel Europe making contracts with dye makers over there making dyes to make the injection molding products over here. My brother Dave, he was, well he was a machinist. And we both worked, he and I both worked for General Electric plant in Pitchburg [ph]. Small steam turbines during the war because they froze us in the plant. So when we left there, we went into refrigeration, air conditioning. And I became an electrical engineer. So we started up an electrical contracting business. We ran a contracting business for thirty years. We turned it over to our employers and we retired. I retired when I was fifty-six. And he retired when he was fifty-eight.

END SIDE A, TAPE ONE. BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE ONE.

EYLES: [not understood]

LEVINE: What do you mean you turned it over to your employers?

EYLES: Well we had a new piece of employees. It was a kind of a business that, where my brother's doctor told he had to give it up because it was too much stress and he had a heart problem. So I says "Well, it's too big for me to run by myself." I didn't feel as if I wanted to do it. We had a bookkeeper that started working for us when he was in high school. And he come along, he'd been working for us almost twenty years. And I went out and I recruited a couple of other fellas. One of them was a foreman for us for almost ten years. Another one had an associate engineer's license. So we took those in and we just turned the business over to them. Let 'em have it. And my brother and I just quit.

LEVINE: Wow, what a generous act.

EYLES: Well, we didn't need it. And they worked for it. Oh, its kind of business you have to work at. This isn't something you can just step in and it sells itself. You have to be right out there, plugging for it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

EYLES: And that was 1970 we did that.

LEVINE: Wow.

EYLES: So I've been retired for 24 years. Of course I went crazy for awhile, until my wife talked me into buying a computer. And so I went back to school. I learned how to program a computer.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

EYLES: So now I have a computer here. I have a computer in Florida. We bought a condo in Florida, so we're down there for five months of the year. Up here the rest of the time.

LEVINE: How nice. Well, just stepping back a bit. Uh, so I had some questions for you. Oh, you mentioned your mother packed the feather bed.

EYLES: Yep.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything else that she packed?

EYLES: (sighs) Oh, she brought china with her. You mean things like that?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

EYLES: Yeah. She brought china. As a matter of fact, (laughs) she brought a carving set that was made in Shetfield [ph] England. I still have the carving fork. I don't know what happened where the knife finally went. The camp (?) we had, picture of it up there on the wall, the one on the left, got in Grottenmass [ph]. Still has the knives, bone handled knives out of that set that my daughter uses those down there now. Uh, knicks, knick-knacks of chinaware. She brought over small cups, carnation cups, the Welsh cups, things like that. But in the process of moving over here, my wife, my mother was never very content over here. That was the only bad thing about that thing, moving. We moved almost every six months in this country while she was living. Every time she moved, she'd break something. So all the china she brought with us all finally gradually disappeared.

LEVINE: Did you move every six months because she wanted to, be more satisfied?

EYLES: She wasn't, she wasn't happy wherever she was. That, in other words, in England, she would go out in the backyard and she'd talk over the fence to her neighbors. Out here, the neighbors across the street, were a mile away from you. So she couldn't do that. I think primarily that was the reason. But she brought a lot of things like that over here. Now, I have a set of brass candlesticks here. There were six of them. When we left England, she sold them to her sister-in-law. My father was over there in 19, oh about 1940s. After World War II, I guess it was about '48. He found them. He brought them back for me. Now those candlesticks goes back to pre-revolutionary war times that they had. They came down through her family. Sort of like an heirloom. Things like that she couldn't bring 'em and she only had so much room she could pack. So she brought what she thought was things closest to her, which are primarily china.

LEVINE: Hmm.

EYLES: Now everything else of course, outside the featherbed mattress, she bought out here for furniture.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving Mountainash [ph]? Do you remember leaving the town and saying goodbye to people?

EYLES: Uh, not too much. I do remember leaving one thing. I had a smooth terrier, smooth-haired fox terrier. And before my father came out here that dog died. Now, I had the measles and my grandfather Griffiths brought the dog to me as a pup in his overcoat pocket. And he was my pet and I raised him. But, and my mother couldn't slap me. The dog would go far, protected me all the time. And I've seen him in a couple of fights over there too, fighting with other dogs. Before we left, before my father left, the dog died and I still think to this day that my father had poisoned him. Cause he buried him out in our back yard with quick lime, covered him with quick lime. Cause you couldn't bring a pet over here.

LEVINE: Oh.

EYLES: And I'm quite sure if I, if he was there, I wouldn't have left England without him, ya know. But so as far as kids are concerned, that I don't remember much about that.

LEVINE: Hmm. Yeah. I guess it does make sense. If you couldn't have brought him.

EYLES: No, you couldn't bring pets like that. And he couldn't give him away because he was too attached to me.

LEVINE: Is that what you call a pit-terrier?

EYLES: No.

LEVINE: No.

EYLES: This is a smooth-hair fox terrier.

LEVINE: Fox terrier.

EYLES: Little, about this long, stands about this high.

LEVINE: Hmm.

EYLES: They make nice pets but, I imagine they would be vicious, ya know, with someone else, if someone attacked you. But he wasn't vicious to me at all. He was like a little pet.

LEVINE: Well, um, what can you say as to a child's Christmas in Wales? (laughs) What were your Christmases like there?

EYLES: Same as they are over here, actually. Just the same thing. Because I got to back to Christmas in 1919 because I don't think I remember the ones previous. We had a Christmas tree in our dining room, well kitchen or whatever you call it. Christmas tree all decorated with ornaments and it used to have candy canes on it. It had licorice pipes on it. (laughs) I remember this because, (laughs) my brother David and I used to go up and eat a piece of the pipe every once and awhile on the tree. And just leave the rest of it on the tree. (laughs) I remember that. And we used to have snow there. But not quite as you have over

here. Essentially, it was all the same thing. The only difference would be instead of turkey, like we'd have goose or duck, things like that. That's primarily what they had over there.

LEVINE: Hmm.

EYLES: But the rest of it was all the same. My brother and I went looking for Christmas presents one day, one year. And we found them in the bureau drawers. And we would told we couldn't, weren't gonna have any that year cause we found them. (both laugh)

LEVINE: Now would be, would you give, exchange presents and everything over there?

EYLES: Uh, I don't know about that end of it because we were on the kids, we were always on the receiving end of it. I don't know what my folks would do that. But I can't see them exchanging presents because they were both large families. Uh, thirteen, fourteen in each family. And when you get thirteen, fourteen [not understood] you take all the kids- the nieces, the nephews and all that, well ya know, it gets pretty, very big. And it wasn't, the profession wasn't a rich profession by any means. It was a living wage so you had no extra money to throw around.

LEVINE: Yeah. How about other occasions for celebration?

EYLES: Guy Fawkes Day.

LEVINE: What's that?

EYLES: Guy Fawkes (slower for pronunciation) Day.

LEVINE: Guy Fawkes Day.

EYLES: That was celebrating the time when they tried to burn down the Houses of Parliament. That was one big day with all that. And then, uh, there was what they call Boxing Day, which is the day after Christmas. Uh, in fact my brother Thomas was born on Boxing Day. That was his birthday. That was a celebration day. It was a holiday. The end of summer they had Monday bank holidays. All through the summer, Monday the banks were closed. That was a holiday, during the summer.

LEVINE: But did people work on those days?

EYLES: Uh, the miners did. Miners worked, usually worked six days a week, five or six days a week. Then they, during the war they worked in twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Now World War I, I'm talking about now. Uh, and I remember seeing a zeppelin go over our area back during World War I. I remember standing out in the street with my mother watching it. And that must have been about 1917, I would think. Because I'd have been too young to remember it before that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

EYLES: But uh, Easter of course was, is a, international.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

EYLES: That's, that's about the only ones I can think of now.

LEVINE: How about celebrations for rites of passage in one way or another? Like either, ya know, confirmation or-

EYLES: Well yeah we were all baptized and confirmed in the church. Of course, I was baptized over there but I was confirmed over here in uh, oh, Episcopalian church over here in Pitchburg [ph]. But this was a branch of the English church actually, its same derivative deal. Uh, because they had, they had Catholic church over there, Episcopalian. And I mentioned the Welsh church. Those are the three I remember from over there.

LEVINE: How about on the occasion of births or weddings or did you remember any of those observances?

EYLES: No.

LEVINE: Were slightly different?

EYLES: No, nothing different. Just my aunt's wedding, the one I remember- this was 1927, by the way, when I was fourteen and we went over there- uh, we were at my aunt's wedding, that's my mother's sister. And there was nothing different about that wedding. She had the family into her house. They were married in church. My cousin played the organ in church for 'em. He's a minister, he's a minister. And then he and I rode with them when they went off to catch a train to go on the honeymoon.

LEVINE: Hm.

EYLES: It was no different than over here.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

EYLES: They shared a big cake in their mother's house. It was a three layer cake, I remember that cause I was fourteen and they had a stand underneath it. Yep.

LEVINE: How about deaths and funerals? Was there any difference in them over there compared with here?

EYLES: Well back in those days, now, the only difference was they used to carry the casket. On the shoulders, walk up the hill to the cemetery. That was, the cemetery was, let's see, one street over from where we lived and at the top of the street. That was, the cemetery was [not understood] was buried in. Because I had a uncle who, my uncle died in 1919. And he was buried. He had consumption, which is TB today. He was carried up and buried in the cemetery. But they're the same as they are over here. No difference.

LEVINE: Um-hmm. And had did your mother and father adapt to life here? Did they, did they adapt or did, your mother wasn't really content you said?

EYLES: No my father was alright cause he, he used to like to play cards. And he'd go out and play wist [ph] on a Saturday night, things like that. He get along fine. No problem with him.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And how about grandparents? Did any of them come over here?

EYLES: No. Well, I said my granddaughter mentioned one thing to me one day. Said, ya know, she said the only one in high school I can think of, she says that has five grandparents, she said. (both laugh) Says there's you and Gram. She said Dad's mother and father, she said. And Gram's father, which would be her great-grandfather. He was living with us at that time. (laughs) And every once and awhile I speak to my wife and said, you know I said, I said "I came out here" I says "I have no grandparents." When I come out here when I was seven, [not understood]. I saw my grandmother and grandfather Griffiths when I went back in 1927 when I was fourteen. We were over there for three months with my mother. And I used to go out with walking with my grandfather at that time. But that was it as far as grandparents were concerned.

LEVINE: Huh. Now is this grandfather that you used to run away-

EYLES: Yeah.

LEVINE: And go to his house?

EYLES: Yeah, that's the one.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. What was the occasion for your mother and you to go back? What, it must have been about seven years after you came over.

EYLES: Well, she'd never been back, see. Like, you've heard of people that almost every other year they're going back and forth. She'd never been back and I think she just got lonesome. She wanted to go back to see her mother and father. And her sister, the wedding I mentioned, her sister wanted to get married. And she wanted my mother there to help her pick out dresses, things like that.

LEVINE: So you went with your mother?

EYLES: Yeah. I was the only one.

LEVINE: Only one.

EYLES: Yeah. The others stayed here. My brother, he was married at that time. And he worked at the paper mill here. My brother Tom went out west, he worked on the railroad. He wasn't going to hang around home. My brother Dave stayed home with my father and he worked on a, amusement park for the summer. I was the only one who went.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

EYLES: Three, a little bit over three months, come back. I was two months behind in high school. I had to make up two months work in high school.

LEVINE: Hm. Well, how, how would you compare the character, let's say, of, of the Welsh or even English with the American character having lived with both?

EYLES: I think'd I trust the English and Welsh more than I'd trust the Americans, if that's what ya mean. (laughs) They, they seem to be a little more truthful standing back of you. Now, outside that, I see no difference. I grew up with Finnish kids, German kids, uh, Russian kids. All my playmates. Irish, over here.

LEVINE: Right here in Pitchburg [ph]?

EYLES: Right here in Pitchburg. [ph] We all got along good. All lived on the same street. Uh, which is just a little bit north of here. I haven't moved out of west Pitchburg since we've been here. In 1920, I've been right here. I met my wife here in West Pitchburg. And uh, I married her here. Now, her nationality is uh, well, Swedish-Finnish on her mother's side and her father I say is Irish. So, you got a mixture of nations. They call it the melting pot.

LEVINE: How did you meet your wife?

EYLES: Eh. Up north, about a mile up the road up here, I was working on our mobile one day. My brother Dave threw a piston through the block and I was replacing the engine in the car. And I was sitting on the fence and she came walking out with a friend one night. This was, after supper. We stopped and start talking and visiting and I just walked home with them. That was it, there on. I was eighteen, she was fifteen.

LEVINE: Wow.

EYLES: And we've been married, see, six from fourteen is eight? Fifty-eight years.

LEVINE: Do you know what it was about her that made you be interested?

EYLES: I don't, I keep kiddin' her, I says, I said "you smell good." She stole her mother's talcum powder. (both laugh) No, actually I, there was really nothing. She was uh, her [not understood], she was a Methodist, so far as religion was concerned.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

EYLES: And uh, it's just one of those things that's all. What can you say that? You like someone. Now we've been married fifty-eight years

I said. My daughter, the youngest daughter, that's that one over there, she's the lowest. She was married twenty-eight years almost. My oldest daughter has my oldest, has a, my oldest granddaughter. Uh, she's a doctor. She's a gynecologist. She married three years, she get a divorce. My mother, my wife's fa-, mother and father were divorced, then remarried. Now why do we stick together after fifty-eight years?

LEVINE: Yeah, do you have any idea?

EYLES: Yes. I'm quite content. I always said a marriage is like any other partnership. It's a partnership. You have to give and take from both sides. And if you can't give and take, it's gonna fail. Now my brother and I ran a contracting business. And I do mean a contracting business. At one time we had over a hundred men working for us. Well we had a little dispute once and awhile. But he left, to me he left the running of the business as far as the big jobs were concerned, estimating I mean. We get along fine. Twenty-five years running a contracting business as a partnership.

LEVINE: What's your wife's name?

EYLES: Uh, Lylla. L-Y-L-L-A.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

EYLES: Silverburg. I said she was Swedish. Swedish-Finnish. Her grandfather was Matt, Matthew Silverburg. The proper pronunciation is Matti, M-A-T-T-I. But it's Matthew in English. And uh, I forget now, Mati, yeah her grandmother's name was Matilida Silverburg.

LEVINE: And your children's names?

EYLES: Judith Anne, named after my mother. And Linda Margaret, named after my mother. My mother's name was Margaret Anne. So we just took two names from her.

LEVINE: And you have, what you say, six?

EYLES: No, five grandchildren.

LEVINE: Five children.

EYLES: I have two children and five grandchildren. And uh, two grandchildren aren't married yet. The other three are. And uh, two great-grandchildren.

LEVINE: Wow.

EYLES: Girls.

LEVINE: Huh.

EYLES: That's the one that's getting divorced.

LEVINE: You have all girls? Girls, no, are your grandchildren girls?

EYLES: No, not all. There's two boys and three girls. Actually, you might say there's two boys in the family if you want to look at it like that. (both laugh)

LEVINE: Uh-huh, wow.

EYLES: And then my oldest brother, all he had was boys. But in his family, he has uh, he had four sons, two of them are dead. The other two are living. Two of them were divorced, one was divorced three times. I think it's three times. Maybe four. He married a wife, one wife twice. He married her [not understood].

LEVINE: Well, what do you think, what kind of difference do you think it made to you having started out in another country and coming here as a first-generation American?

EYLES: Well I think, as far as I'm concerned, I grew up with the customs of this country. And uh, it was easier for me to absorb those customs than an elderly person or something. Uh, I, I think my brothers adapted. A matter of fact, my brother David adapted, I think, even more than I did. Because he was American right from the word go. Uh, Tom and Ernie were a little different. They were a little slower to get back into it. But it's just a, as you grow up with the kids, uh. I can even say like, this integration business with different colors. If you leave the kids alone, let them play. Let them grow up. They're alright. It's the grownups in the fear. Because like I was saying about the kids I grew up with now right on the same street. My best friends, one was a Russian. Now this kid, you know, his folks were Russian. Uh, there was an Irish one. There was an English one. And uh, when we moved to a three, five Finnish boys I used to go out with, play. In fact, I start to learn to speak Finnish at one time with those kids, ya see.

LEVINE: Hmm.

EYLES: And, a Frenchman around here, well, one whole section of the city was French at one time because of the cotton mills. There was a lot of cotton mills here.

LEVINE: Were they coming from Canada or France?

EYLES: Yeah, Canada. They came down from Canada.

LEVINE: What kind, did the games that you played as a child, do you think they differed much between Wales and here?

EYLES: Nope. They just, because when we came out, it was practically the same thing. [not understood] was one we played. And uh, of course Duck on a Rock, we always played. And Run My Good Sheep Run, we played. Hide and Seek we played. The only difference was, I guess, would be football. Cause we didn't have baseball over there. Cricket, cricket versus baseball. And rugby versus football. And my father was a great soccer player. He was captain of the team in Mountain Ash. But

uh, those things, they weren't that important. Cause soccer now has gone international. But before it was more a continental game. They didn't play it so much over here. But outside that, everything was about the same.

LEVINE: How about stories when you were little? Did, was there anyone who either told you stories or do you remember stories that you read early on that, that really stuck with you?

EYLES: Well, not so much stories that I remember over there. Uh, I just told you what I was told about when I used to run away, things like that. But uh, there was one of the things, two of the things my mother brought over with her was a complete set of World War I illustrated encyclopedias. There were twelve volumes on it with pictures and write up on the different things. And there was a set of what they call Children's Encyclopedias, she brought those over. The encyclopedias set was loaded with stories. The fairy tales that you grow up with as kids now. And my father brought over a set of gardening books. Now, those are things she brought over that I know of.

LEVINE: Hmm. Were you, was your family a family of readers?

EYLES: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. We're all readers like that. My daughter, this one over here now, has the gardening books. The others are upstairs. I don't what's, what's going to happen to them when we're gone. Now, this house you're in used to be a duplex. My mother and father lived on this side and we lived on the other side. And when they passed away, I took over the whole house. Cause we ran the business out of here.

LEVINE: Mmhmm. Well is there anything else you can think of that's, as far as maybe customs you've held on to that you knew as a small child or um, anything else about being in this country, that comes to mind?

EYLES: Not that I can think of because uh, a couple of my aunts that are over here. Two of them. And uh, they adopted quite good. Now, my cousin just came over. He visited us over here a month or so. And uh, there's really nothing that I can think that between the English and the Americans, they're so close. You couldn't differentiate between them.

LEVINE: Well, would you, do you think your life would have been pretty much the same-

EYLES: No.

LEVINE: if you had stayed?

EYLES: No. No, no. My life would have been a lot different if I'd stayed over there. (coughs) More opportunities over here, educational wise. Now, they have good education over in England that you can go fairly decent with that. But, but over here it seems that uh, the opportunities are broader. Now uh, if you want to just take out, take us for example. There's four boys that came over from a coal mining area.

Four of them in a sense made success of their lives over here. And I'm speaking financial success in a way now.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

EYLES: Uh, culture successship also. Uh, none of us went to college. Not one of us went to college. You might say all of us were drop-outs. I dropped out of school when I was sixteen. But I wound up as a registered engineer in Massachusetts. Because I could go back to school, which I did. I went back nights.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

EYLES: Uh, now those opportunities, they may be over in England. But I don't know if they are. One of my cousins that came over here, he's in construction business. He's drywall contractor. Now, drywall contracting is sheetrock..

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

EYLES: But he goes over to the Middle East! He working out of Egypt and places like that over there. Well, the reason for that, if we want to do that, we just go from here, we go to Florida. There's the same distance. (laughs) But he's in a foreign country. But I'd rather stay in this country (laughs).

LEVINE: Uh-huh, I see.

EYLES: Have no language barriers. (laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-hm. Well how are you finding this time in your life? This retired time.

EYLES: Uh, it's getting a little better. But this, you say, it gets tarnished. You know, these golden years are a little tarnished. Well, the only reason for that actually is the, [not understood] inflation you might say coming now through it. Because, if you want to realize, every ten years, the cost of living doubles. I don't care how far back you go. I used to have a chart when I was in business here. I went back pre-Revolutionary times. Every ten years, the cost of living would double. Now, on an average. So we've been, I've been retired now twenty-five years. So, my income has quartered in comparison. Because the cost of living doubling the first year, then redoubling again. A hundred dollars when I retired is now worth twenty-five.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

EYLES: These are the only things that you catch. I'm living too long. (laughs)

LEVINE: Well, you're eighty years old now, right?

EYLES: I'm eighty-one.

LEVINE: Eighty-one. Uh-huh.

EYLES: Yeah, yeah. So, I live too long.

LEVINE: Uh, I don't think so. (both laugh) You seem like you have a very rich life in a lot of ways.

EYLES: Well, we do. Cause we have a good family. A very good family. And they're all close knit family.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

EYLES: Cause, my wife's family was very close-knit.

LEVINE: Um, well, we're just about out of tape. So, I think we need, this is good place to stop. I want to thank you very much. I've been speaking with George Eyles. We're here in Pitchburg, [ph] Massachusetts, November 21, 1994. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. And I'm signing off. Thanks.

END OF INTERVIEW.

EI-570 EYLES