

EI-599/WILKINSON

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ARCHIBALD WILKINSON

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IRELAND, 1926

AGE 2

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SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National  
Park Service. Today is Tuesday, April 25th, 1995.

I'm in Albany, New York, with Archibald  
Wilkinson. Mr. Wilkinson came from the north of  
Ireland in 1926 (a clock chimes in the background)  
and he was two years old at the time. Present  
also in the room is his wife, Mrs. Wilkinson.  
And you may hear a clock chiming in the  
background. Anyway, good morning.

WILKINSON: Good morning.

SIGRIST: Can we begin by you giving me your birth date,  
please?

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WILKINSON: September 16th, 1924.

SIGRIST: And where were you born?

WILKINSON: Kilrea, Northern Ireland.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Kilrea, please?

WILKINSON: K-I-L-R-E-A.

SIGRIST: Whereabouts in the north of Ireland is that?

WILKINSON: Well, that's about probably thirty miles from  
Belfast.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about the town. I realize you  
probably have no first hand recollections of it,  
but tell me what you know about the industry in  
the town and what it's famous for, if anything.

WILKINSON: See, there are little shops along there. My father  
had a blacksmith shop when I was little. But  
other than that, I mean, we've been there four

times. And the house I was born in, they were taking them all down. They were going to make a high development, and that was 1980, so...

SIGRIST: Did you get a chance to see the house that you were born in when you were visiting?

WILKINSON: Yes.

SIGRIST: You've been, you told me before we started the tape you've been back four times.

WILKINSON: Four times, yes.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever tell you anything about your birth?

WILKINSON: No, but she, uh, I was raised on goat's milk. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did your family have a goat? Where, where would the goat's milk have come from?

WILKINSON: Gee, that I don't know, no.

SIGRIST: You mentioned your father was a blacksmith. What was his name?

WILKINSON: William.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you know about his family background.

WILKINSON: Well, he had a lot, he had a big family, and brothers and I've met two of them on my trip but they all have passed away since then, since I've been there, you know, back.

SIGRIST: What do you know about what your fathers parents did for a living or any of that kind of information?

WILKINSON: Well, my father's father was a blacksmith, too. And my Uncle Jim was a, he was very at blacksmithing and, not horses but wrought iron work and, and then Uncle Bob. But they have passed away since I've been there.

SIGRIST: What did your father tell you in later years about his experience as a blacksmith?

WILKINSON: Well, it was tough making a living. People paid you off in a chicken or something to eat rather than money. If, you know, a lot of people didn't have money. And it was, that's what you got for shoeing horses, something to eat to have, you know, most times.

SIGRIST: Was shoeing horses the only thing he did as a blacksmith or were there other things that he made?

WILKINSON: Well, he could make a lot of things. When he was over in this country he worked for Tilley Ladder in Watervliet [NY] and he made hooks for scaffolds and different things like that.

SIGRIST: So when he came to America, he sort of did similar kind of work?

WILKINSON: Yes, uh huh.

SIGRIST: What was your father's personality like? When you remember as you were growing up, describe your

father's personality and his temperament.

WILKINSON: Well, he, he was a quiet man. He never, uh, if you weren't good, though, you got the strap. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: What, what kinds of, what kinds of things as you were growing up were you not supposed to do? What, what would raise his ire?

WILKINSON: Oh, going down the Hudson River, swimming in the river, which we all did. I came from Watervliet. That's seven miles up from Albany. We always swam in the river and that would make him mad. The river was so dirty then. We'd swim in it anyway because we had no other place to swim. We worked on a farm when we were young. And then we'd go up, like on Saturday, and run right in the river with all our muddy clothes on. That was after school we worked on the farm.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things do you remember your father enjoying for himself? Like what, after he came home from work or, what activities did he enjoy



SIGRIST: And, again, let me ask you about your mother's  
temperament and her personality.

WILKINSON: Oh, she was a quiet woman. Yeah, she never raised  
her voice. She was quiet. Their family had come  
from Scotland years ago. And all their, they're  
all gone now, too. Of course, she, she never had  
no family left over there when we went back.

SIGRIST: Did, had she been born in Scotland?

WILKINSON: No, North Ireland.

SIGRIST: She was born in the north of Ireland.

WILKINSON: Her father was born in Glasgow, Scotland.

SIGRIST: What did her parents do for a living?

WILKINSON: Well, in Scotland her father was a, he ran a tram  
which I believe is a trolley car or something.  
And then, when he come over here they, he worked  
in the cemetery, a grave digger.

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SIGRIST: So her family came, her parents came to America.

WILKINSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did they come with you or did they come at a  
different time?

WILKINSON: They came before me.

SIGRIST: They did. Do you know what year they came?

WILKINSON: Gee, I don't know.

SIGRIST: Boy, that's an interesting change of professions,  
though, (Mr. Wilkinson laughs) from running a  
trolley car to be a grave digger.

WILKINSON: Yeah. Well, they went to Ireland then, so, and they  
have nobody left. I have cousins in Watervliet  
that are Coulters but they were born here.

SIGRIST: I see. Do you know how your parents met?

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WILKINSON: Gee, when we were over there once my aunt, there was a grove and she said, "That's where your mother and father made love," (he laughs) so up there.

SIGRIST: Just what you want to know.

WILKINSON: Yeah, well, I came home and told my mother and she got mad. (he laughs) She was kidding me, my aunt. She's a Wilkinson, my aunt, Wilkinson.

SIGRIST: So that was your father's sister?

WILKINSON: Yes.

MRS. WILKINSON: Yes.

SIGRIST: So the answer to the question is you're not exactly sure. (he laughs)

WILKINSON: Yeah. See, they never, even over in Ireland, they never kept records of where, when, where they were, come from and, they asked somebody, like their name was Lamont [ph]. To me that was a French name but he says it was Scottish or it might

have been Lamond [ph] one time and then they make it  
Lamont. But they don't keep records like we did. I  
never found anybody that kept them.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever tell you any stories about you  
as a baby, something that happened when you were a  
baby prior to coming to this country?

WILKINSON: Oh, probably that I was a good, wee boy. (he laughs)  
I don't know. She, all she tells me about when I  
come over here and I couldn't get in the country. I  
heard that a hundred times. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Well, tell me a little bit about why your parents  
wanted to come to America.

WILKINSON: Well, it's, see, it was tough over there, the  
conditions, living conditions and you never could  
get ahead no place, not in his line of work. But I  
have cousins over there, they're working  
construction. They, they have contracting  
outfits and, gee, they're doing well.

SIGRIST: Did your, did your parents ever tell you anything

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about the house that you lived in, in, we started  
talking about this. But did they ever tell you  
anything about the details of the inside of  
the house at all?

WILKINSON: No, I never heard, no.

SIGRIST: No, nothing like that. What was your parents'  
religion?

WILKINSON: Presbyterian, Protestant.

SIGRIST: And who was more religious, Mom or Dad?

WILKINSON: My, I think my mother was, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did they ever speak about any kind of religious  
conflict in Northern Ireland prior to coming to  
this country?

WILKINSON: Well, my mother used to tell me, when she was little,  
the, (he laughs) the Catholics would throw stones  
on her roof of their house, so, other than that, I  
mean, for years that was going on, for hundreds of

years. But maybe things will work out now.

SIGRIST: But it was, it was economical reasons that your parents wanted, for economic reasons that they wanted...

WILKINSON: Yes. Well, my father's, or my mother's father and grandmother and uncles come over here and then my mother followed.

SIGRIST: Oh, so there was, there was quite a bit of family here in the States prior to...

WILKINSON: Yes, they were.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your, your, your father, I assume, wanted to come to America so he could support himself better. How did your mother feel about leaving her, her town?

WILKINSON: Well, my mother, Mother really missed it but my father, I don't think he, when he went back in 1955, he really didn't want to go. And he, he became more Americanized and, you know, forget the

old country.

That's the way it is.

SIGRIST: So he was, he was happier about being here than...

WILKINSON: Yeah, the only thing, he had no family here. His mother and father were still in Ireland, and brothers. He was, he was the only one that came over so he always had that missing. His mother and father, when they did go in '55, they were already passed on.

SIGRIST: It's interesting that your mother has all the family here but she misses Ireland. Your father has no family here, (Mr. Wilkinson laughs) they're all in Ireland, and yet he's happy to be in America.

WILKINSON: Yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about the voyage itself. Do you know what the name of the ship was that you took?

WILKINSON: No. We had it in the passport once from my mother and father but I, I, it was so many years ago I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Do you know where the ship left from?

WILKINSON: Well, we had to go up and, where was that up in the north of Ireland and go out on what they call a tender to get on the ship. And the ship had come from other countries before it came to North Ireland where we got on. And everybody had a different brogue or talk. They all were different. And everybody was different on the ship, having come from other countries. So it was a rough trip. And I guess we were down in the bottom of the ship. But we, I think, I really think once it, it took fourteen days to come over here then in the ship. And then the American doctor says, over there they examine me, he says, "Well, maybe he wouldn't go, get through Ellis Island. Maybe he will. Take a chance." So, when I come over to Ellis Island they, they didn't want to let me in the country. They held me up two weeks. And my mother said they, the doctors had said, "Send him over to his, back to his grandmother, back to Ireland." And my mother said, "Well, if you're going to send him back we're all going back." So they

let me in. And here I am. I'll be seventy one and I'm still living, so...(he laughs)

SIGRIST: Tell me what it was that, what kind of a heart condition this was, what, what...?

WILKINSON: Well, it was, I don't know, they used to call it "leakage of the heart" years ago, which I think was a murmur. I'm not sure but when I was a kid, I wasn't supposed to do this, I wasn't supposed to do that but I'd do it anyway because how can you keep a kid tied down? Playing ball, which every kid does. I mean, it never bothered me that much but...

SIGRIST: Did you have any brothers and sisters in Ireland prior to coming to America?

WILKINSON: I had a brother, William, born there and I had a sister, Moira, born there and a sister, Elizabeth, born there.

SIGRIST: What was the, the middle child that you said? (mispronouncing her name) Maura?

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WILKINSON: M-O-I-R-A, Moira but she called herself Myra. She didn't like Moira. And then I had a brother, Jim, born in this country.

SIGRIST: So it's, coming to America it's Mom, Dad, you, two brothers and a sister?

WILKINSON: No, one brother and two sisters.

SIGRIST: One brother and two sisters. And then the other brother was born here.

WILKINSON: Born here, Jim.

SIGRIST: Do you know what time of the year it was that you came?

WILKINSON: My uncle came down from Watervliet with warm clothes on us, for us, because it was cold weather.

That's all I know. And I was only two, so...(he laughs)

SIGRIST: Tell me, did your parents tell you any stories about

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any happening on the ship that, that stuck out in their minds?

WILKINSON: Only that there was so many languages from other people from Europe.

SIGRIST: That's what made as impression on them.

WILKINSON: Yes.

SIGRIST: I'm just curious. Who talked more about, about their past and what you went through, your mom or your dad?

WILKINSON: Mostly my mother, uh huh. She'd always tell me about goat's milk I drank. That was good for me, goat's milk. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: These little tidbits of information.

WILKINSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: All right, well, tell me a little bit about the Ellis Island experience and what you were told, or do you

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have any conscious memories of that?

WILKINSON: No, I don't but my mother said it was tough down there because, you know, we have to go back and holding me there.

SIGRIST: Did she talk at all about where, where they slept on the island or...?

WILKINSON: No, she never said that, but (he pauses)...

SIGRIST: It must have been a tense time with her.

WILKINSON: Yeah, it was with me, I mean, you know, "If you're going to send him back we're all going back," and gee, I'm glad they let me in (they laugh) because there is no place like America to me.

SIGRIST: Where did you, when you were finally released from Ellis Island after this two week detention and they figured out you were just fine and they let you all go, where did you go to?

WILKINSON: Watervliet, New York.

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SIGRIST: Did someone meet you at Ellis Island to take you off?

WILKINSON: My uncle, William Coulter, my mother's brother.

(a clock chimes in the background) He brought us  
up.

SIGRIST: And, I should have asked you, was there something, do  
you know what you took, what your family packed to  
take with you to America?

WILKINSON: Just clothes. That's the only thing we took.

SIGRIST: I'm wondering if your mother or father took a certain  
object of some sort, like a Bible or something  
along those lines, that would be a remembrance of  
their, of Ireland?

WILKINSON: Gee, the pictures and the passport is all I ever saw.

SIGRIST: So nothing that you know of. All right, so your  
Uncle William comes down. He brings you up to  
Watervliet. What is your earliest memory?

WILKINSON: Earliest memory?

SIGRIST: Your very earliest memory.

WILKINSON: Skipping school (he laughs) when I was in kindergarten. Me and another kid, we weren't going to go back to school one day. We were sitting on this lady's porch in Watervliet. She said, "You kids better get back to school." And we must have been five years old. That was before, I don't remember nothing before then. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Well, what, when you got to Watervliet, what happened when the family first got to Watervliet?

WILKINSON: Well, we lived with my uncle, William Coulter, and then we got our own flat.

SIGRIST: How did your family support themselves?

WILKINSON: Gee, it was tough because my father, like during the Depression, he worked three days a week and with five, and I had a sister, another sister born here,

Sarah, but she had died. So things were really rough.

SIGRIST: Was your brother who was born in this country born right away?

WILKINSON: Jim, he's about two years younger than me, I'd say.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollection of your mother being pregnant or, or having the child at all.

WILKINSON: No, uh huh.

SIGRIST: Nothing. And was the, the girl born prior to the boy or after?

WILKINSON: (to Mrs. Wilkinson) Would you say prior? Yeah, prior.

SIGRIST: So was actually the first born in this country.

WILKINSON: Uh huh. Sarah.

SIGRIST: Do you know what she died of?

WILKINSON: Gee, I really don't.

SIGRIST: Your mother probably didn't talk about it that much.

WILKINSON: No, she didn't.

SIGRIST: So you're living with your uncle. What did your  
uncle do for a living?

WILKINSON: He was a grave digger at Albany Rural Cemetery. He  
worked there over, he worked there fifty four  
years digging graves. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Was your mother's whole family in the Watervliet  
area?

WILKINSON: Yes. Well, my father had family in Australia, and in  
Baltimore he had a sister. That's even about the  
only one I, you know, I met.

SIGRIST: But you're basically going to your mother's family.

WILKINSON: Yes.

SIGRIST: Right. Were her parents in Watervliet, too, at that point?

WILKINSON: Well, they lived in the Albany Rural Cemetery because my grandfather worked there and he had a house. He had a house and everything but my uncle Jimmy, he wanted to (?). He had a veteran's pension for the First World's War and he bought a house in Watervliet. And he moved up there because the house in the cemetery had no, it had outside bathroom, no electric lights and, it was very nice but probably not for them. (he laughs) But when I was a kid it was nice.

SIGRIST: When you were, when your memory kicks in about five or six years old, what is your father doing to support the family at that point? Had he gotten his factory job by then?

WILKINSON: Yeah, he worked for Tilley Ladder. I can, from the blacksmith tool...

SIGRIST: Can you spell Tilley Ladder for us?

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WILKINSON: T-I-L-L-E-Y, Tilley. Ladder, L-A-D-D-E-R.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see. That's not a full name. That's the  
Tilley Ladder Company, or something.

WILKINSON: They're still in business.

SIGRIST: I'm, I'm curious. Do you know that if your father  
tried to ply his trade as a blacksmith when he  
first came or was that not even a possibility?

WILKINSON: Well, there weren't many horses in the, you know, a  
few. At one time he had left Tilley Ladder and  
went to work for Charles Freihofer, which was a  
baker in North Troy [NY]. And he was shoeing the  
horses there. But Tilley Ladder wanted him back  
after about five years and he went back to  
Tilley Ladder.

SIGRIST: And, of course, as you say, I mean, this is the mid-  
1920s. By now horses are, are beginning to, to be  
used less and less for transportation.



SIGRIST: Yes. Was education, how did they approach the education of their children?

WILKINSON: Well, they must have only made about kindergarten at their age, or first grade. In fact, my sisters, they were older than me, they only remember coming over here, so...

SIGRIST: I'm, I'm wondering if your parents pushed education onto their children or not. Didn't, or maybe they didn't push it onto you, so...

WILKINSON: Oh, over here...

SIGRIST: Over here...

WILKINSON: ...they did, over here, yeah, because you, you know, if you didn't go to school a truant officer was at your house then in the afternoon looking for you (they laugh), so you went to school.

SIGRIST: Did you ever, as a child, run into any kind of, uh, being made fun of or persecution because you were

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not American born?

WILKINSON: No, I, because we talked American.

SIGRIST: You had no accent.

WILKINSON: We had no brogue or nothing because we were brought up here. My mother, my mother and father had a little bit but it wasn't much (to Mrs. Wilkinson), was it?

SIGRIST: What do you, what do you know of that experience?

WILKINSON: Well, my mother, she, they could tell when she talked that she came from over there. And my father, I don't think he had much at all that I remember that, he's been dead since 1959, so...

SIGRIST: Do you know how old your parents were when they got to America? I mean, how old were they in 1926?

WILKINSON: Gee, they must have been in their thirties someplace, oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: So, young people.

WILKINSON: Young, yeah, they were young. But it was tough leaving your, like my father left his, had to leave his family to come here. He always missed them and he never got a chance to go back until 1955. And they went by ship. And his mother and father had already passed on, so...

SIGRIST: Was your, when that opportunity came to go back to Ireland to visit, was your mother, how did, how did your mother about being able to go back to Ireland?

WILKINSON: Well, my mother, she's, everything is so different over there. Even when we went it's, it's like years behind the time. Like my uncle says, "Your mother and father wouldn't know this country." When we were there it had, it had, you know, came along so much further and we haven't been there since 1980. Maybe things came along more since I've been there.

SIGRIST: But when your parents went back in '55, it was still

pretty primitive?

WILKINSON: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Did the whole family go back to Ireland in 1955? Did you go with them?

WILKINSON: No, just my mother and father.

SIGRIST: How long did they stay?

WILKINSON: They stayed two, three months they stayed.

SIGRIST: And did your mother ever tell you how she felt about America when she was over visiting Ireland?

WILKINSON: Well, Ireland was so behind the times and here, here things were so much ahead. And...

SIGRIST: My goodness, they had been here for almost thirty years at that point, so...

WILKINSON: Even Ireland today, (he clears his throat) we've been there and things are, I mean, you go through the country, you see outside bathrooms and, even



could cook. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, this, of course, is, is an old world, I mean,  
she's holding on to what, how she cooked in  
Ireland, yes?

WILKINSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes. Tell me, you mentioned Irish stew. She cooked  
that. What is that? Explain for us on tape what  
Irish stew is and how your mother made it.

WILKINSON: Well, Irish stew is really, I think, it was lamb but  
I believe that she used beef, made beef, you know,  
beef stew. And lamb, lamb stew is made with lamb.  
We had a lot of lamb, which they do over in  
Ireland. They eat a lot of lamb. And we ate a  
lot when we were young.

SIGRIST: In this country?

WILKINSON: Yes.

SIGRIST: All right, so she's got the beef. Then what does she

do with it?

WILKINSON: Well, just like when I make it. You just cook it and  
throw everything in, the potatoes (he laughs) and  
carrots and onions and hope for the best. (he  
laughs) That does, over there you eat pretty good.  
The potatoes over there are so much better  
tasting than the ones here. I don't know why  
that is. Maybe there's no chemicals or  
something but they really do taste good. I should  
go over and get a five pound pack. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: What was your, what was your parents' favorite  
holiday in America?

WILKINSON: Oh, I'd say Christmas. Christmastime was always  
nice.

SIGRIST: And how, how did your family celebrate Christmas in  
Watervliet [NY]?

WILKINSON: Oh, they'd have a Christmas tree and a dinner and  
like, Thanks--, uh Thanksgiving we'd have a big  
meal and Christmas a big meal.

SIGRIST: So, well, you just brought up an interesting point.  
So they're celebrating Thanksgiving. That's an  
American holiday. How did that come about, do  
you know? How did they start to celebrate  
Thanksgiving?

WILKINSON: Gee, they all, all, all my life it was. The only  
time you used the dining room table (he laughs) was  
at Thanksgiving or Christmas. Otherwise, we  
all ate in the kitchen. And there were five kids  
around the table and my mother and father and  
one wanted to sit here. (he gestures) That was  
your chair. Nobody else sat in your chair when we  
were kids. You had, that was your chair,  
wherever you sat.

SIGRIST: And were there, were there certain table manners that  
were imposed on you on formal occasions?

WILKINSON: No. Just be good and eat what's in front of you,  
which a lot of times I didn't like. Tapioca, I'd  
say, "Them are cat's eyes," and I wouldn't eat that  
stuff no matter what. (he laughs) And it was big

tapioca when I was a kid. Now they're small,  
small. But I always thought they were cat's  
eyes. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Tell me about, were there, were there any kind of  
rules for living your life, philosophies of life  
that your parents bestowed upon you? Certain rules  
of thumb that they had, they hoped you would  
live your life by?

WILKINSON: Well, going to church every Sunday. We went to  
Sunday school and church. Be good, you know,  
because my father had a big strap which, when I  
was a kid all, all kids got a strap, a big barber  
strap, and when you weren't good you got it. (he  
laughs)

SIGRIST: And can you tell me, can you tell me a specific story  
about something you did that you were punished for,  
other than swimming in the river.

WILKINSON: Oh, I used to do a lot of things. Climb trees, we  
weren't supposed to. You know, a lot of things.  
Everything you weren't supposed to do we did

when we were kids. Climb fences, steal grapes out  
of people who grew grapes, go around and sit under  
a street light and eat them all. The next day  
you looked and there were grapes all over the  
street and your shirt is all stained from sticking  
the grapes in it when we went into people's yard to  
take them. So, and then every election they have  
a big, big fire. Get all the barrels and everything  
that burns we'd take from people's yards and  
go down to the old (?) in Watervliet and  
have a big, big pile of barrels, fences,  
anything wood that burned, and have a big fire on  
election night. They don't do that no more.

(he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you, did your parents become citizens?

WILKINSON: Oh, yes, in, uh, I think it was 1935.

SIGRIST: It took them a while to...

WILKINSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: But do you remember that experience? Can you, can

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you                    tell me what you remember about them getting  
ready to,                    to become citizens?

WILKINSON: Well, I, I just can't recall but we became citizens  
                                 because they became citizens. And then later I  
went                                   down myself and became a citizen, you know I  
took,...

SIGRIST: Took out your papers.

WILKINSON: ...took out my own papers. And my brother Bill, he  
                                 went and had his taken out. But, and then he had  
a                                   stroke in which he lasted seventeen years. He  
                                 couldn't take or nothing. He just died in,  
last July.

SIGRIST: This was your uncle?

WILKINSON: No, my brother Bill.

SIGRIST: Oh, your brother, your brother. And your brothers  
are                                   a little bit older than you.

WILKINSON: No, just Bill was.

SIGRIST: He's a little bit...?

WILKINSON: He was a couple years, yeah. He, he passed away in July. He was, they say seventeen years and he never was, he was in the paratroopers in the Second World's War. He wasn't a guy that was ever sick and he just had a stroke and that was it.

SIGRIST: When you were maybe a little bit older, like junior high school or high school age, were you ever embarrassed, and that may be too strong a word, but did it ever bother you that you had immigrant parents that, that when they spoke people could identify them as immigrants? (a clock chimes in the background)

WILKINSON: No, because Watervliet was all immigrants. Most people came from Ireland, mostly the south, some from the north. So everybody just blended in. And there were a few Italian families and, everybody got along when I was a kid.

SIGRIST: So you don't remember any instance of conflict

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between the different ethnic groups in Watervliet?

WILKINSON: Never, never, no. Everybody got along. Every, no matter what religion you were, they all got along.

SIGRIST: What was the first job that you ever got that you were paid for?

WILKINSON: I worked on a farm after school for a nickel an hour.  
(he laughs)

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: And how old were you at that time?

WILKINSON: I must have been seven, seven, eight years old, sticking the onions, was it? Yeah, sticking onions in. And then you picked beans for a quarter a bushel and peas, you would pick them. And when we were older, we worked in a bowling alley at night setting up pins.

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SIGRIST: And what about your sisters? Were they expected to go out and, and work?

WILKINSON: Yeah, my sister Lil, she worked waitressing. She lives in Florida now. And my sister Myra, which is Moira but she liked Myra, so, she worked at General Electric in the office. But now she's in a nursing home. She's been there about a month now.

SIGRIST: Did, did, when you were making more money, when you got like a real job, you know, making...

WILKINSON: Uh huh.

SIGRIST: ...a little more, were you expected to contribute some of what you made to the family till?

WILKINSON: Yeah. She had a, paying room, you know, board and, we all tipped, you know, chipped in.

SIGRIST: So your parents expected you to, to pay them some amount of money to keep the household running.

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WILKINSON: Yes.

SIGRIST: Who kept track of the money in the family? Who, who was the bookkeeper in the family?

WILKINSON: Mostly my mother.

SIGRIST: Your mother was.

WILKINSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And do you have any idea what your father made in the factory, doing factory work?

WILKINSON: He made eighteen dollars a week; worked three, three days a week during the Depression, so...

SIGRIST: So in the 1930s he's making eighteen dollars a week.

WILKINSON: Eighteen dollars, which eighteen dollars might have bought, it bought a lot more than today (he laughs) if you made eighteen.

SIGRIST: In America, what did your parents do for

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entertainment, for fun? How did they relax and  
have fun?

WILKINSON: Well, I, I can remember them taking my grandmother  
Coulter to the movies once in a while, and she was  
an old lady. She enjoyed the cartoons and, uh,  
they, they went up to the cemetery to visit  
their parents, my mother's parents. And that was  
a Sunday walk on up to the cemetery, you know, to the  
house.

SIGRIST: Were your grandparents, well, obviously they must  
have been adults when they came to America...

WILKINSON: Uh huh.

SIGRIST: ...talk to me about what you remember about them in  
America and, and what their life was like. Now,  
Grandpa is a grave digger.

WILKINSON: Right.

SIGRIST: Grandma, did she work?

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WILKINSON: No, no.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about, about your interaction  
with them in this country?

WILKINSON: Well, they lived in the cemetery in the, that, that  
to them was probably like living in Ireland with no  
lights or nor gas, no indoor bathroom and they  
just, as I say, you don't get no excitement  
either. When we, you know, that, they, we went  
to a few dances or something but maybe years ago  
they didn't have things like that. I don't know.

SIGRIST: Did your grandparents ever tell you stories about  
their life in, in Ireland?

WILKINSON: No.

SIGRIST: Or in Scotland even?

WILKINSON: No, I don't remember anything.

SIGRIST: What was, exactly, your relationship to your  
grandparents? Were these people that you saw

frequently?

WILKINSON: Oh, yeah, I've seen them all the time because my grandfather, his name was Archibald. And then my uncle, he's Archibald. He was in the First World's War and the Second World's War he went in again, so, and my Uncle Jimmy was in the army in the First World's War. See, they were here years before my mother and one, Uncle Archie, he went to Australia and then he came back. They worked, him and Jimmy worked ships and they used to go out of New York and they'd come back and then meet down there where the ships come in. I forget what you call it. They'd meet there sometimes when their ships would come in.

SIGRIST: I was, I was just driving at, wondering if your, if your grandparents, how Americanized your grandparents had become, if at all. It seems like they lived kind of an isolated life, at least as you're explaining it to me, so maybe they really didn't.

WILKINSON: No, they didn't. They were old then and they didn't

seem to mix with people.

SIGRIST: Did the Irish community in Watervliet have social functions and things for everyone to get together when you were growing up?

WILKINSON: Gee, the only, the only time they got together was at, at wakes. (he laughs) And then they'd all be there, you know, a funeral or a wake. And they'd all be in the kitchen drinking beer. All the ladies would be in where the body was. It wasn't funeral homes in them days. And all the men would be in the kitchen drinking beer. That's the only time they, they ever got together. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did, did people from the south of Ireland and people from the north of Ireland mix freely here in America?

WILKINSON: Yes, they all, they always got along. I don't remember any harsh words or bad feelings. They might have had them but they kept them to themselves but, then when the trouble started in

North Ireland you start feeling it. "Oh, you're from the north." "Oh, you're from the south," and...

SIGRIST: All right, so, and that, that wasn't until a little bit later.

WILKINSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: When you were attending school, say high school or junior high school or even before, did you go to school with any other, with noticeably immigrant kids? Kids who had accents of any sort, uh...

WILKINSON: No. The only one I remember was a fellow, he come over from Italy. And he, you know, he couldn't talk too well. He's the only one. Otherwise, they were all born here.

SIGRIST: And how did the, the kids treat the, the guy from Italy?

WILKINSON: They were good to him, uh huh, yeah.

SIGRIST: They weren't nasty or making fun of him?

WILKINSON: No, kids them days weren't nasty. Maybe we were but I don't remember that part (they laugh) because everybody was, liked everybody. I never seen any hate when I was a kid. Maybe it's, uh (he pauses), at least I don't remember any hate, anybody hating anybody because they were different than you. People got along. And life was tough them days. They got along. Today it's too much freedom. That's why there's so much trouble. There's just, you were brought up different. You didn't, you were home nine o'clock. You were home at nine o'clock. You weren't home at ten. My father would go out looking for you. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: With his barber strap. (Mr. Wilkinson laughs) It is, it's a whole different mentality. Parents approach their children differently.

WILKINSON: Yeah, today. Of course, when I got older I'd be out later, you know, twelve, one, two, three. But you

heard about it, though, you know. Everybody got  
older, did different things than they do when  
they're little.

SIGRIST: Well, why don't you fill us in on, on, give us a  
thumbnail sketch of the rest of your life. What,  
what happened when you graduated from high school?

WILKINSON: Well, I worked at different roofing companies and,  
gee, I had a lot of jobs when I was young. If you  
didn't like a job, because you never made much  
money. I worked roofing for eighty five cents an  
hour and that was after the war. And, if you  
didn't like a job, you just went, you left. You  
didn't like it, you got another one. But I worked  
in the New York State Capitol. I was a Democrat.  
I was in there four years in the Assembly and then  
I went Republican and, you know, most, well, I  
got the gate because you were different  
politics. And, I worked at the State  
University in maintenance work until I left on  
disability, you know, I hurt my, I had a bad, I didn't  
hurt it on the job. It's just arthritis and a bad  
disk. And I took what you call "ordinary disability"

from the state. I hated to leave but there was  
nothing I could do about it because if you didn't  
do your work, or couldn't do it, they'd fire you  
quicker than a minute or find some excuse and let  
you go. That's the state of New York for you.  
(he laughs)

SIGRIST: When did you get married?

WILKINSON: That's a, that's a question (he laughs, gesturing to  
Mrs. Wilkinson) for the boss.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Wilkinson, would you like to...

MRS. WILKINSON: It's been forty five years.

WILKINSON: Oh, God.

SIGRIST: And what was the date that you were married?

MRS. WILKINSON: Uh, what was it? February 17th, I'm trying  
to...

SIGRIST: February 17th, what year? (Mrs. Wilkinson pauses)

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Well, fifty years ago is 19--...

MRS. WILKINSON: '50, '50 [sic, 1949].

SIGRIST: 1950 [sic, 1949] you married. February 17th, 1950  
[sic, 1949]. (addressing Mr. Wilkinson) And what  
was your wife's name and maiden name?

WILKINSON: Marjorie Brusco. She was a, her father was French  
extraction. Her mother was Scottish.

SIGRIST: Can you spell the maiden name, please?

WILKINSON: B-R-U-S-O, Brusco. But maybe that was shortened one  
time, wasn't it?

MRS. WILKINSON: Yes.

SIGRIST: Brusco. Or maybe even spelled differently.

WILKINSON: Yeah, uh huh.

SIGRIST: And did you have children?

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WILKINSON: We have a daughter, Barbara. (to Mrs. Wilkinson) How old is Barbara now?

MRS. WILKINSON: She's forty four.

WILKINSON: Four. She has M.S. [multiple sclerosis] but she works for the city of Albany in an office but she, you know, she has a tough time walking with a walker. But she has two children, too. In fact, Joanne, her daughter, is getting married in May, May 13th.

SIGRIST: So she has Joanne, and what's the other...

WILKINSON: Sal.

SIGRIST: Sal.

WILKINSON: Salvatore, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Tell me about the first time, what was the first time you went back to, to Ireland? What was the first, the year that you went back the very first time?

WILKINSON: (addressing Mrs. Wilkinson) What would you say, dear?

MRS. WILKINSON: '68.

WILKINSON: '68 or '9.

MRS. WILKINSON: 1968.

WILKINSON: '68.

SIGRIST: Sometime in the late '60s. did you go back to the town that you were born in?

WILKINSON: Oh, yeah. I was all over because I, we went to the south of Ireland, the north of Ireland and we, we went all over.

SIGRIST: Well, I'm curious what your emotional response was to seeing the town that you were born in, if you felt a connection or if you didn't feel a connection, something like that.

WILKINSON: No. As I say, the house was empty. They were going to make a new housing development but there were two old ladies, and I forget their name right now, Gavin or Davin. Anyway, they remembered me and my mother and all of us because they still lived in this house and they've probably passed on now because they were old when I was there. But I had uncles and aunts drive me here and there. But when I, the next time I went we rented a car and I got scared to death driving because you drive on the wrong side of the road and all the cars, you shift with your left hand and, oh, what a job. And I drove down through the south of Ireland all over. Scared all the time.

SIGRIST: What, what do you think would have happened to you if your parents had never come to America?

WILKINSON: Well, that's, as I say, I have cousins that are contractors and they're always pretty busy and one has, they're in a bagpipe band, another cousins, and they sell musical instruments. And they're all doing good because, they're good workers.

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SIGRIST: So you think you would have, you might have been...

WILKINSON: I might have been something like that. (they laugh)  
It's hard...

SIGRIST: Playing in a bagpipe band.

WILKINSON: I know I wouldn't be in a blacksmith's shop. (Mr.  
Sigrist laughs) That's rough work.

SIGRIST: What advice do you have for someone listening to this  
tape a hundred years from now, listening to you  
talk, what advice would you have for them on, on  
how to live their life successfully?

WILKINSON: Well, you don't start out trying to be a millionaire  
when you're young. You have to work up to it. I  
never became a millionaire but we always, you  
know, we got by and we can never hit the lottery to  
make it that way, (he laughs) rich. But we, we  
like now we're always thinking of selling because,  
getting an apartment. We wouldn't have all  
this. I can't shovel snow no more. I mean, I do it  
but I've got a heart operation. I'm not supposed

to do and I do it. I mow the lawn once a week. I just can't sit still anyway.

SIGRIST: Just for the sake of the tape, tell us exactly what kinds of operations you've had. Again, someone one hundred years from now might find this very interesting.

WILKINSON: Well, they say I was, uh...

MRS. WILKINSON: Remember about your rheumatic fever.

WILKINSON: Oh, well, I, as I say, I couldn't get in the country. It was a bad heart. And then, when I was young, younger, I had rheumatic fever quite a few times and I couldn't get out of bed for maybe a week or two at a time. And then, when I got older, a doctor in Watervliet said, "I think you should have your (he thumps his chest) heart checked again." And they, they put me all through the tests with the dye and they said that, "You have two bad valves and you need a two bypass." So, I lived through it anyway but, and then I had my corated [ph] artery cleaned out. So

I've been through the mill in operations. (they laugh,  
a clock can be heard chiming in the background)

SIGRIST: But I think that's, that's an interesting point,  
that...

WILKINSON: Well, one doctor up there seen me one day, he said,  
"Geez, I should take you with me when we go around  
giving these seminars and say, 'Look at the size  
of that fellow and he's still living.'" And it's  
been four years ago since I had it.

SIGRIST: Well, you know, you're a big, robust guy.

WILKINSON: Yeah, that's what I mean.

SIGRIST: It's interesting that you've had so many kinds of  
operations.

WILKINSON: But it, it ran in my family, heart trouble, with my  
father, fifty nine, and he had brothers in Ireland  
that were young and died of heart. So, my  
sister had a heart operation. My brother Jim had  
them. My brother Willy died of a stroke and

my sister in Florida, she's not too well with  
heart. So it's just, the doctors claim you inherit  
all these things. But my mother's people, they  
live to be all in the eighties. They  
weren't troubled with that stuff.

SIGRIST: Just all genetic, I guess.

WILKINSON: Yeah, it is.

SIGRIST: Also, before we end, I want to say that Mrs.  
Wilkinson has come in and told me that you were  
married in 1949, not 1950 and she's also suggested  
here that I ask you about your mother's scones.

WILKINSON: Oh, geezs. my mother could make it with eggs. Some  
people call them scones [he pronounces the word  
"scawns"] and some people, do you know what a  
scone is? They're a round piece of dough. My  
mother could make them, boy, beautiful. My  
cousin's wife was over from Australia last year,  
two years ago, and she taught my wife how to  
make them. But my wife never makes them.  
They're a round piece of dough about that high (he

gestures) and boy, they're good.

SIGRIST: When would your mother serve them?

WILKINSON: Oh, plenty of times, yeah.

SIGRIST: There wasn't a certain time during the day that they  
were served?

WILKINSON: No, and in Ireland you get a lot of, as I say, some  
call them scones (pronouncing it as "scawns"),  
some call them scones (pronouncing it with a long  
O). We always called them scones (pronouncing it  
as "scawns").

SIGRIST: (imitating Mr. Wilkinson's pronunciation) Scones,  
scones.

WILKINSON: Scones, so...

SIGRIST: Well, I think, on that happy note, I will thank you  
very much for letting me ask you questions about  
your life.

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WILKINSON: That's quite all right. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist, signing off with Archibald  
Wilkinson, on Tuesday, April 25th, 1994,

(correcting himself) 1995 in Albany New York.

Thank you.