

EI-612

GLADYS MAY BILLINGHAM LAMBERT

BIRTH DATE: MAY 1, 1899

INTERVIEW DATE: MAY 2, 1995

RUNNING TIME 45:48

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: HOMESTEAD HEALTH CENTER
STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED AND REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 6/1998

ENGLAND, 1913

AGE 14

PASSAGE ON "THE CAMPANIA"

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: During the introduction to this interview, the location is incorrectly identified as Darien, Connecticut. The interview actually was conducted in Stamford, Connecticut. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 6/14/1998.

SIGRIST: Good afternoon, this is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, May 2nd, 1995. I am in Darien Connecticut [sic: Stamford] with Gladys Lambert.

LAMBERT: Yes.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Lambert came from England in 1913.

LAMBERT: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You were fourteen years old.

LAMBERT: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: And she just celebrated her ninety-sixth birthday yesterday.

LAMBERT: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can we begin by you giving me your birth date.

LAMBERT: 1899.

SIGRIST: May 1st, 1899.

LAMBERT: Oh, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: And where in England were you born?

LAMBERT: Well, well, it was close by Smethwick, but I don't know. It's just a little bit of a town, an old dairy or something like that.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the town?

LAMBERT: Oh, I think it was Langley Green [ph].

SIGRIST: Langley Green [ph].

LAMBERT: Yeah, I think that was the name of it.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the town when you were a
little girl?

LAMBERT: Oh, oh, a whole lot as far as that goes. And I'm just
trying to think of all the things that happened. Uh,
ask me something. I can't...

SIGRIST: What did the town look like when you were growing up?

LAMBERT: Oh, it was very farm-like. It was all like groups of
farms and, you know, and all that. And my mother had
so many children. I was busy pushing baby carriages
all the time. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: How many children did your mother have?

LAMBERT: Twelve.

SIGRIST: Twelve.

LAMBERT: And she raised nine of them. And I, my sister died in the, in the middle of March. It's May now. And she was nine years younger than me. I'm ninety-six. She was eighty-nine.

SIGRIST: Oh, your sister just rece--, just died not too long ago.

LAMBERT: So everyone is dead now but me. I'm the only one in the family left. They're all gone.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the house that you lived in?

LAMBERT: Yes, you know how they are. They're all in a row, you know. All in a row, up and downstairs.

SIGRIST: What is the house made out of? What do they build houses out of in England?

LAMBERT: How's that, what?

SIGRIST: Yes, what is the house made out of?

LAMBERT: Oh, they're all brick. No, no wooden houses. No, they're all brick. And, I'm trying to think, and up and downstairs, you know, just rooms.

SIGRIST: How did you...

LAMBERT: No hot water. No gas. No electricity in the beginning. Later on we got gas.

SIGRIST: What, do you remember how old you were when you got the gas in the house?

LAMBERT: Well, I know it was, I had to be older then, my God, I certainly got to be older than ten. I don't know. I really don't know exactly when we moved from, from Langley Green [ph] over to this other place. I know my grandmother, I know she, she, she lived on this main road. She had the same birthday I had, my grandmother.

SIGRIST: Whose mother was she?

LAMBERT: My mother, my mother's mother.

SIGRIST: Do you have any stories about your grandmother?

LAMBERT: All I know is that I just loved to go over there. She was so nice. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What did she do for you that was so nice?

LAMBERT: Well, she cooked some kind of food that was different to my, to my mother's and it was so good. And she brought me a skipping rope for my birthday. I'll always remember because it had handles on it, wooden handles instead of plain rope. I was always over there. I just loved to go over there, and my aunts and uncles, and so many of them, and all that.

SIGRIST: And that was all your mother's family?

LAMBERT: All my mother's family. But my father's family, I never knew them. And anyway, my father's mother I don't know. When my father was about twenty one, she committed suicide for some reason or another. I don't know what happened. But I always remember my father

said she died from the (unintelligible). It was terrible.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

LAMBERT: His first name? Arthur.

SIGRIST: And what did he do for a living in England?

LAMBERT: Oh, he was like a, well, he works on a lot of tools, almost like a tool maker, you know. And he'd go early in the morning and fix the machines. Of course, they had a, you know, they had to get them (jumping?), all that, because it wasn't modern like nowadays. Not in 1913. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What was your father's personality like?

LAMBERT: Oh, he was lovely. The nicest guy you ever met. Every night he'd come in and then, there's a nurse here [i.e. Homestead Health Center] and she says the same thing. And I always tell her he always said, "Good night and God bless you." And I told that nurse who happens to say the same thing, I said, "You remind

me of my father."

SIGRIST: It's like going to bed with your father in the house again. What did he look like?

LAMBERT: Well, I can't tell you what he looked like exactly. I think he, I think he, I think he looked me like on the father's side.

SIGRIST: What, what color hair did he have?

LAMBERT: Well, he had, he certainly wasn't dark, he is, half the family had black hair and half of them had blonde hair. I was blonde. My sister were blonde, and all the rest of them.

SIGRIST: Did your, do you know anything about when you were born? Did your mother ever tell you a story...?

LAMBERT: Yes. She told me she took me to Liverpool and I cried all the way down there. (she laughs) I always remember that, yeah.

EI-612/LAMBERT

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

LAMBERT: Alice.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

LAMBERT: Whose?

SIGRIST: What was her name before she was married?

LAMBERT: Hobbins, H-O-B-B-I-N-S.

SIGRIST: Hobbins.

LAMBERT: Hobbins, Hobbins. H-O-B-B-I-N-S, Hobbins.

SIGRIST: And what was your name before you were married?

LAMBERT: Oh, Billingham.

SIGRIST: Can you spell it, please?

LAMBERT: B-I-L-L-I-N-G-H-A-M.

SIGRIST: Thanks.

LAMBERT: Billingham.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's personality like?

LAMBERT: Well, she was a little different than my father, but she was nice, too. They were all very nice. I had good parents.

SIGRIST: Do you have a story that you like to tell about your mother when you were a little girl?

LAMBERT: Well, I'm trying to, uh, if there was anything special, I don't know. Everything, everyday seemed to be the same day.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did your mother have to do around the house?

LAMBERT: Well, she made a lot of bread. (she laughs) She baked twenty loaves at a time on account of we didn't buy

EI-612/LAMBERT

ready made bread. And she baked her own. Oh, you know, there was no, no stoves in England. We had no stoves, but in the side of the open fireplace there's a hole in the oven, uh, an oven in the hole. She put a fire in it and then, when the fire had gone out and got hot, then she baked the bread.

SIGRIST: And how did she make the bread?

LAMBERT: Oh, she had a great big pan and did it by hand and mixed the dough. No fancy machines.

SIGRIST: What other kinds of food did you eat in England?

LAMBERT: Well, it wasn't too fancy food. It was much better than America's to tell you the truth. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: But, but what did you eat sort of on a daily basis in England?

LAMBERT: Oh, in the morning we might have oatmeal or something like that. At lunch time, well, if we had a meal, the meal was always lunch time. Anyway, we got two hours

EI-612/LAMBERT

off from school, that was. And night time, I remember, my mother would cut three pieces of bread, one, two three, four, five, and that was our supper. Just some bread and butter or margarine or whatever. And some tea. And we never had any milk to drink. We had it in custards. She made custards.

SIGRIST: How did your mother make custard?

LAMBERT: Well, just like you would make them here, you know, with the eggs and the, eggs and sugar and milk or whatever. And I, I don't know whether she baked that in the oven. I don't remember. All I know is she, and tapioca she used to make, too. That was good.

SIGRIST: What was your favorite food when you were a child in England?

LAMBERT: I'm trying to think if there was anything special. My, my most special stuff was at my grandmother's. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, what did your grandmother make that you remember?

LAMBERT: I'm trying, trying to think. I know we used to go over, when I had to get a job when I was fourteen in England and, uh, so, I couldn't, it was too far over to my house so I would go over to my grandmother's. And she would give me my lunch, but I can't remember what she gave me. But it was my lunch. It could be most anything. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What religion were you in England?

LAMBERT: Uh, Methodist, yeah. Oh yeah, I went to Sunday school all the time.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about going to Sunday school?

LAMBERT: I remember walking to Sunday school and there were, and on the road there was a, there was a cow in a barn. (she laughs) I'd see him on the way going down there. I remember a lot but then, you know, it slips your mind for a few minutes and then, later on, it will all come back again.

EI-612/LAMBERT

SIGRIST: Well, I'll just keep asking you questions and that will help.

LAMBERT: Yeah, oh, sure.

SIGRIST: Was there a church that you went to?

LAMBERT: It was a chapel. It wasn't a big church, it was very small. Oh, later on, when I got older, I think I went to church when something happened or somebody got married or something or other. That's the only time.

SIGRIST: And how did you practice your religion at home?

LAMBERT: Oh, we were always saying our prayers and we was always looking at the Bible. I was just thinking, in the Bible we have so many, in fact, we have a hundred year old Bible in our house. My, my aunt brought it over from England and gave it to my mother but, of course, my mother is dead. So she gave it to my sister. But they're all dead, so I think the only one whose got it now is my son. (unintelligible) size of the house.

EI-612/LAMBERT

SIGRIST: And who was more religious, your mother or your father?

LAMBERT: Oh, they were all more or less the same. My mother was very religious in the beginning but after my father came to this country, she didn't seem to bother so much. I don't know why, but, some reason or the other.

SIGRIST: How did you celebrate Christmas in England?

LAMBERT: Oh, you don't have no Christmas trees like you do here. You have like a big hoop, like a round, like, and you had little pieces of candy covered with paper all hung on that. Never had a Christmas tree, never had Christmas tree.

SIGRIST: Is there a special food that you ate at Christmas time?

LAMBERT: Oh yeah, plum pudding, plum pudding. My mother boiled it, you know, she had to make a fire under a great big, you know, what she washed the clothes in. Then, when she made the plum pudding, she put water in that and boiled the plum pudding in it because it was wrapped

EI-612/LAMBERT

up in material, you know. And she put it in and boiled
it in that. You would never put up with the way we put
up with things over there now. (she laughs) Never.

SIGRIST: Were there certain rules that your parents wanted you
to obey in the house?

LAMBERT: Well, I guess like everybody else's kids, we were
taught, I mean, to be good, to be kind and we always
said our prayers every night.

SIGRIST: Is there a prayer that you remember now that you said
as a child in England?

LAMBERT: Oh, yeah. "Our Father, who art in Heaven. Hallowed be
thy name." Yeah. When I'm asleep at night, I say it
all the time. And then it kind of slips my mind in
the daytime. (they laugh).

SIGRIST: Is there a piece of furniture that you remember from
your house?

LAMBERT: Oh, a rocking chair, always rocking the kids. Oh, I

EI-612/LAMBERT

was always pushing the kids up and down in the carriage. I was the oldest girl.

SIGRIST: You mean you were, you were taking care of your brothers and sisters.

LAMBERT: Well, I was, sure, I'd go out and mind them and I'd push them up and down the street.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the birth of one of your brothers or sisters?

LAMBERT: My, my brother, my brother Arthur is the oldest. Then there was Freddie and then there was, one, one of them died with measles, one of the children. But Ruth was the youngest. Oh, I loved her. In fact, I have a picture of her in here at home when I'm holding her. I brought it from England, because I'm, nine years older than my youngest sister. That's the one that just died.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when Ruth was born?

EI-612/LAMBERT

LAMBERT: Yeah, I, I...

SIGRIST: What happened when Ruth was born?

LAMBERT: I do know it until now but I forgot again. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Okay, well, no, it's not, I don't want the date. I was wondering if you remembered, if you remembered when your mother was pregnant with...

LAMBERT: In, oh, listen, oh, nobody knew in those days whether their mother was pregnant or not. They only, the doctor come in with a satchel in his hand and that's how he brought it. (she laughs) Now, even babies know where they're born. We don't know nothing about that.

SIGRIST: So did parents try to explain to the children where the babies came from?

LAMBERT: No, never. That wasn't, I never, not even until I came to this country, I still didn't know where babies, where babies was born until the woman I was minding some children for, she was expecting a baby. I never

EI-612/LAMBERT

knew it. I knew nothing about it. Anything!

SIGRIST: They just didn't talk about that sort of thing.

LAMBERT: No, no. I never knew nothing about it. Even your own
body, you know, like menstruate and all that stuff.

I knew nothing about it. I was minding some kids in
somebody's house and she saw blood on the bed or
something. That's the only way I found out about
that. So, you see, and then I worked, even when I worked
in the, oh, the cleaners and dyers downtown in, uh,
oh what the hell...

SIGRIST: Here in America?

LAMBERT: In America, then, I was in America. Oh, I worked in
England, too, in an eyeglass factory.

SIGRIST: Now you were, how old were you when you got the job?

LAMBERT: In England? Oh, I just turned fourteen.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you did for the eyeglass factory.

LAMBERT: Well, first they gave me the job of cleaning the lenses and I, I wasn't good at that. So then I, you know, when they make lenses they got like a, a case. And I had to take a hammer and knock the, like a plastic on the back of the lens. I had to hammer it off like that. (she gestures) I only worked from May 1st until, until we sailed for America in July.

SIGRIST: And what did you get paid for the job in England?

LAMBERT: Oh! A dollar a week. Can you imagine? Four shillings.

SIGRIST: Now you said before that your father had come to America. What year did he come?

LAMBERT: Well, my, my, oh, my father came in 1912, right after my youngest brother was born. He came on the, well, first my brother came. The reason he came was my Aunt Elsie came over from [sic, to?] England to visit us with a bunch of (unintelligible). And, you know, America was supposed to be the land of plenty and

EI-612/LAMBERT

all that. So he sails to America when he was fourteen
by himself. And then, later on, he sent for my father
 because my mother said, "I don't want to never see
my son again." So my father came later on. And then
my brother Freddie came. That's the next brother.
He came in 1912, right after the Titanic sank. Did
you know about the Titanic sinking?

SIGRIST: What, what do you remember about when the Titanic sank?

LAMBERT: Oh, I remember it was terrible. They were all having
 parties and drinking and everything else. And, of
 course, we were quite worried because my brother
 Freddie sailed right after it sank. I think he left
in June or July and the boat went down in April, April
 19th, I think the boat went down. [note: the Titanic
 sunk in the early morning of April 15, 1912]

SIGRIST: In 1912.

LAMBERT: Yes, I remember that very well. I mean, there's a lot
 of stuff like that I remember.

EI-612/LAMBERT

LAMBERT: Do you remember when your brothers went to America,
what work did they get?

LAMBERT: Oh, well, in them days, well, they didn't, my father
got them out. What do you think he earned? I don't
know if it was eleven dollars a week he got.

SIGRIST: What was he doing? What kind of work?

LAMBERT: Well, he worked on tools and that. I call it like a
tool and die maker.

SIGRIST: Oh, a tool and die maker.

LAMBERT: Something like that. And he sent five dollars over
every week to my mother and that was supposed to keep,
keep us, that five dollars because my mother didn't
work. There were all those kids to mind. But my
father worked and my brothers worked. Well, see,
after my father came, that's when he sent for Freddie,
my other brother, because he came. My father came,
came in 19--, 1910. My brother, my brother was almost
ten months old when, when my father left.

SIGRIST: When you were a little girl in England, what did you know about America?

LAMBERT: Oh, we heard a lot about it. The land of plenty full of gold. Oh, because I had aunts and uncles over here, yeah, and they, well, and when I got here I thought it was beautiful. So much food to eat. Well, we had food but nothing like they have here, my God Almighty. As I said, we got bread and butter for supper, a slice of bread and butter. Really nothing very fancy. My mother would make some pudding sometime. Well, we were very poor with all them kids.

SIGRIST: What kind of clothes did you wear in England?

LAMBERT: That's what I was trying to think the other day to myself. I think we wore some kind of a bloomer but no pants or nothing, uh, rompers. And, well, you always wore two petticoats. In fact, when I came to America on the boat, we got here August and I thought I'd die with the heat. I had a flannel petticoat on and a cotton petticoat on and a blue velvet suit. That's

EI-612/LAMBERT

when I landed in America.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the blue velvet suit for me, what it looked like?

LAMBERT: Oh, it had a nice little jacket on it. My Aunt Elsie made it for me and it was a nice suit, just, you know, in them days, the old fashioned collars more or less. And then...

SIGRIST: Did you wear a hat?

LAMBERT: Oh God, yes! You always had a hat.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the hat for me?

LAMBERT: Oh, one hat I had in England, I went out in the rain with it. It must have been made of cardboard because it collapsed. (she laughs) The hat fell apart. I always remember that hat. Oh, we always had a hat, my God, people always had a hat. Of course, it never got real cold in the winter. Once in a while you might see a bit of snow. It never, it never got above seventy

EI-612/LAMBERT

[degrees] ever in the summer. Never. I don't even, yes, that was a heat wave.

SIGRIST: Where did you get your clothes in England?

LAMBERT: Oh, my mother sewed some clothes. My mother made a lot of dresses for me. She didn't buy them, no, she made them. She had a sewing machine and she made them.

SIGRIST: You said that your mother didn't have a job. She didn't go out to work.

LAMBERT: No, people didn't go out to work like that. With all those kids, how could she? And where, where would she work? Who would mind the kids and take care of things? In fact, after I got married, I never worked either because I went to live in Brooklyn with my husband.

SIGRIST: So that was typical then?

LAMBERT: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Mothers didn't go out to work.

LAMBERT: Oh, no, no.

SIGRIST: But was it, was it typical for young ladies to go out to work? Like you were fourteen when they sent you to the eyeglass factory.

LAMBERT: Oh, yeah. Oh, oh sure. The children, when they were fourteen or older, were sent to work. And they knew that we were going to America in a couple of weeks. You would think they wouldn't have bothered making me get a job. Oh no, I had to work.

SIGRIST: Did you go to school in England?

LAMBERT: Yeah, but I did go 'til I was about twelve and a half.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about going to school?

LAMBERT: Well, a lot. I knew more than they knew in America. We'd have poetry and everything else and Shakespeare and arithmetic and, I was good at adding up figures.

EI-612/LAMBERT

Arithmetic, if you want to call it. I was pretty good at that.

SIGRIST: Where was the school?

LAMBERT: It was close by. They called it, one school was called the British School. The other school I went to was a church school called Saint Michael's. That was close by, and we did a lot of skipping of rope in between times. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Is there a teacher that you remember from being in England?

LAMBERT: A what?

SIGRIST: Is there a teacher that sticks out in your mind when you were in England?

LAMBERT: Yeah, there was one. I was just trying to think of her name. I was trying to think of her name the other day. Now I can't remember, but she was very nice. And some of them was, uh, a little bit snotty, and some was real

nice.

SIGRIST: What kinds of games did you play as children in
England?

LAMBERT: Oh, we used to play checkers, I guess, and dominoes.
I guess that's about what everybody played.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any songs that you sand as child in
England?

LAMBERT: Oh, there was a lot of odds and ends we sang. There
was so many I can't remember them all. I'm trying to
think.

SIGRIST: If you, I thought if you remembered one you could sing
it for us on tape.

LAMBERT: Oh, I can't sing. I've got no voice. They tell me to
shut up when I open my mouth. And they said I threw
them all out of tune, so I never. At Christmas I sing
carols and I, I'd collect what they gave them, a penny
or so. They only got a penny. (Mr. Sigrist laughs)

EI-612/LAMBERT

That's about all.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me why you came to America.

LAMBERT: Well, I came with the family. I came...

SIGRIST: Your father was already here...

LAMBERT: Oh, my, first my brother Arthur came. He came by himself. He was the only one here. Then he sent for Freddie when he got money enough. That's the next, next brother. And then, and then after that, why, I didn't, my mother brought me and the rest of the seven children on that boat. Can you imagine? My mother...

SIGRIST: So you're coming with your mother.

LAMBERT: My mother, my mother and her seven kids. We landed, when we landed in America, oh, and my sister Lillie, I don't know if they thought she was nuts. They kind of, they kind of kept looking her over because she was acting funny, you know. There was nothing the

EI-612/LAMBERT

matter with her. She was trying to teach all the
foreigners English. That's my sister...

SIGRIST: Where did that happen?

LAMBERT: That happened on the boat.

SIGRIST: On the boat. Where did you go to get the ship?

LAMBERT: Oh, we went to Liverpool.

SIGRIST: And how did you get from your town to Liverpool?

LAMBERT: Oh, we had to, by train from Smethwick. I'll say
Smethwick because it's close to the town you'll
probably know better, Birmingham. Of course, that
was quite a way out of the way but that's the closest
I can describe it. In the midlands of England, you know,
in the midlands.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you packed to take to America?

LAMBERT: Well, my mother took something in a trunk, not very

EI-612/LAMBERT

much. We didn't have much. She took a little something. We bought stuff after we got here.

SIGRIST: Do you remember taking something that was yours?

LAMBERT: Special?

SIGRIST: Something special.

LAMBERT: My mother took some silverware. That was all. I remember that, taking that. I, but I don't remember the, the other stuff at all.

SIGRIST: When you left your town, did anyone give you a little dinner or a party to say "good bye?"

LAMBERT: One lady, I think one lady gave me sixpence or something. That was, that was a lot of money in them days. No party especially. Grandmother, oh, I know. I still have it to this day. The lady next door gave me a nightdress case. It's just a cotton, a little cotton bag that you put your nightgown in. I still got it to this day but it's so faded after all these years.

EI-612/LAMBERT

(she laughs)

SIGRIST: (he laughs) It's been a long time.

LAMBERT: From fourteen to sixty [sic: ninety six].

SIGRIST: Tell me, what sticks out in your mind about the train trip from your town to Liverpool.

LAMBERT: Oh, I thought it was great to have a nice ride on the train. It was all, all great. It used to be great, too, and I went to Stratford-On-Avon to Shakespeare's town that my aunt took me before we went down there. Then we went back to England, you know, later on when I was, in '73. And we went back to Shakespeare and looked at the same place I'd seen before. (Mr. Sigrist laughs) It was great. The whole thing was great.

SIGRIST: Tell me, did you, did you have to stay in Liverpool before you got on the ship?

LAMBERT: No, the boat was right there. The Campania was the name of the boat.

EI-612/LAMBERT

SIGRIST: The Campania, you came on the ship. And, tell me, did you have to undergo any kind of medical exams?

LAMBERT: Oh, oh God, yes. I got vaccinated. I got four vaccinations in my arm to this day between one thing or another. And my brother Albert, I don't know who he thought he was, he went up on the first class deck and he didn't get vaccinated on the deck. He ducked. He hid.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you thought when you saw the boat for the first time. What went through your mind?

LAMBERT: Well, it was so crowded, trying to get on it in the beginning, but afterwards it settled down. Of course, we had to eat in the third class room where the, where the other people that was, you know, richer people, they ate on the first class deck. And they wore (unintelligible). They were more classier. Oh, it was just, oh, it was the greatest time of my life when I stepped on that boat. And then I saw my father on Ellis Island. And then they exam you all on Ellis

EI-612/LAMBERT

Island, too, you know.

SIGRIST: What did they exam on Ellis Island?

LAMBERT: Well, I guess your whole body to see if you're all
right. Checked you out to see if you're all right.
I guess everybody was all right.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me where you slept on the ship?

LAMBERT: Oh, yes. There was five bunks on the (?) and, three in
a row, one two, three and two on the other side. And
five of us, I guess maybe one of them slept with my
mother. It must have had because there were seven
kids. Can you imagine, imagine getting off of that
boat with them seven kids and my mother. She was
like a parade going down the street. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did your mother want to come to America?

LAMBERT: Oh, she was dying to come. Oh, yes, she was. She
wanted to come because my father was here. She
wouldn't want to be left over there with all those

kids.

SIGRIST: And she hadn't seen him for a few years now, right?

LAMBERT: It was two years before we got here over.

SIGRIST: Tell me about, where did they feed you on the ship?

LAMBERT: What did they feed us?

SIGRIST: Where did they feed you on the ship?

LAMBERT: Well, down, downstairs on the, as I said, like a, oh, I don't know what you'd call it, it certainly wasn't upstairs. It was downstairs. In other words, third class you'd want to call it. It was steerage.

SIGRIST: Steerage, yeah. Do you remember what they fed you?

LAMBERT: I don't remember exactly but I know it was good. In fact, oh, by the way coming over, they weighed us when we were over there. Then, when we got to America, they weighed us again. You know, my sister Nellie, she was

EI-612/LAMBERT

seasick all the way over. She lost a lot of weight.
I ate all her food and I gained six pounds. (she laughs)
Can you imagine?

SIGRIST: But you said they weighed you before you left...

LAMBERT: And, and then they weighed you when you got here to see
if you were treated all right on the boat.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's interesting.

LAMBERT: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you, do you remember, perhaps, safety drills on the
ship? Did they tell you where to go if there was an
emergency?

LAMBERT: Yeah, I think they did but I don't remember that so
much, no.

SIGRIST: Do you remember being up on deck?

LAMBERT: Oh it was fun. And you should see the, the fish coming

EI-612/LAMBERT

right up out of the water. I, I couldn't wait to see that, what do you call it, the Statue of Liberty. When I saw that, I knew we were here.

SIGRIST: Did you know what that was?

LAMBERT: Oh, yes. I'd heard about that. Oh, sure. That was some foreigner that gave that, gave that Statue of Liberty, wasn't it? I can't think of his name now, if I remember right.

SIGRIST: That's right. The French gave it to Americans.

LAMBERT: Yeah, I knew it was somebody...

SIGRIST: Tell me about seeing your father at Ellis Island.

LAMBERT: Oh, the minute I looked at his face I said, "Thank God." Oh, it was wonderful to see his face. So we had to, he was on one side of the fence and I was on the, we were on the other, the seven of us on the other side. Oh, you should see it. I think we had the biggest family that come over in a bunch. Seven

EI-612/LAMBERT

kids and my mother.

SIGRIST: Do, do you remember what kind of examinations they gave you at Ellis Island?

LAMBERT: Not too much. I doubt, I think it was more or less just checking (?) Probably checked your heart and lungs out, I don't know.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay at Ellis Island?

LAMBERT: Well, we wasn't there very long. But my brother Freddie had to stay overnight when he came over for some reason. I don't know what happened.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: How long did the voyage take from Liverpool to New York?

LAMBERT: Oh, we left on a Saturday, but, of course, in between

EI-612/LAMBERT

times after pulling into New York City, they took us
on a ferry over to, so we didn't get here 'til Sunday.
We left there on a Saturday, the 26th and we got August
the 3rd, I think it was. I think it was August the
3rd. We left Saturday. If I (unintelligible) look
at the calendar and I can tell that way, an old calendar.

SIGRIST: You have a very good memory.

LAMBERT: Oh, yeah, I remember. I remember an awful lot of
stuff.

SIGRIST: So, so how long do you think you were at Ellis Island?

LAMBERT: Oh, we weren't there very long at all. In fact, I know
it was before, before noontime we went off on the, on
the, uh, and then we went to my aunt's house for, for
supper.

SIGRIST: Where was you aunt's house?

LAMBERT: In Cottage Street in Stamford [Connecticut].

EI-612/LAMBERT

SIGRIST: And how did you get from New York to Stamford?

LAMBERT: Oh, we had to come by train.

SIGRIST: Was there anything that you saw along that trip that you had never seen before?

LAMBERT: Yeah, in New York City we went into some kind of an aquarium and saw fishes. And then I think I remember walking, walking down the street before, before we got on the train to come up here. Oh, we had a ball. We had a great time. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Now, you went to your aunt's house. Whose, whose sister is she? Go ahead.

LAMBERT: Well, my, my father in the meantime rented a house on Belltown. Do you know where Belltown is?

SIGRIST: (not understanding her) Beltstown?

LAMBERT: Belltown, that's off of State, it's up from Stamford. Doctor (?) has got his office up there nowadays. And

EI-612/LAMBERT

he had furniture and the beds and everything. But
before we got into it, they had us (unintelligible)
the whole ceiling was collapsed in. Can you imagine?
The whole ceiling in the house, which (?)

SIGRIST: Tell me how you spent the first night in America with
your aunt. What, did you, what happened?

LAMBERT: Oh, we didn't stay with my aunt. We went right up to
Belltown.

SIGRIST: You went up to the house.

LAMBERT: Yeah, we there for supper. of course, I don't know
exactly what time we got there but I know, I know we
ate something in my aunt's house. Then we had to,
then we had to take the, oh, what do they call them,
the trolley, the trolley they call them, the trolley
to Belltown. And then can you imagine getting there and
then finding the top of the house had collapsed.

SIGRIST: So what happened? Where did you sleep?

EI-612/LAMBERT

LAMBERT: Well, we stayed there, I mean, it was just like a lot of the ceiling, well, they fixed it later. But we had to go in there. Of course, we didn't go up in the attic. (they laugh) That as the attic.

SIGRIST: Now, you mention your aunt. Whose sister is she?

LAMBERT: My father, that's my father's sister-in-law. My father's brother's name was Jack and she was named, what did I say her name was? I forgot now.

SIGRIST: You didn't, you didn't say.

LAMBERT: Oh, darn it.

SIGRIST: Well, but it's actually his sister-in-law.

LAMBERT: It was his sister-in-law. I was trying to think of it.

SIGRIST: Tell me what happened the next morning, your first full day in America. How did you spend it?

LAMBERT: Oh, just wandering around the place seeing what it was

EI-612/LAMBERT

all about, yeah. Of course, they, they have a, there wasn't no school right then because in America they have a long holiday. In England, you're lucky to get a week or two weeks at a time all year round. Here they have, have a holiday. But I, I never went to school in America. I was only twelve and half when I quit in England and I knew more than the kids was learning when they came here. And I did at that time.

SIGRIST: Did you get a job?

LAMBERT: Oh, I got a job. I told them I was fourteen but you have to be sixteen, you know, in this country. I said I was fourteen. So I got a job for about four weeks and I, I got laid off after that for some reason. Maybe they didn't need any more help.

SIGRIST: What was the job?

LAMBERT: Oh God, it was terrible. Can you imagine cleaning great big uniforms and I had to walk a mile to pick up an iron that was heated on a stove. The stove was heated, I don't, a belly stove, you know.

SIGRIST: A pot belly stove.

LAMBERT: Yeah. And I had to walk a mile to get the iron. By the time you got the iron it was almost cold. That, that was a hard job for me.

SIGRIST: What, what kind of uniforms were these?

LAMBERT: Like chauffeurs, and all that stuff, you know. Later on I worked for somebody up in Belltown. Her husband was a chauffeur someplace.

SIGRIST: Doing what kind of work?

LAMBERT: Oh, you mean when he was a chauffeur? Driving cars.

SIGRIST: No, you, you. When you worked for them, what kind of work were you doing?

LAMBERT: Oh, oh, you mean, I, uh, minding their kids. She had two kids. I didn't have enough of my own. I'm always minding somebody's, my whole life has been minding kids

EI-612/LAMBERT

ever since I can remember.

SIGRIST: When you came to America, did your still mother expect you to take care of your brothers and sisters?

LAMBERT: Well, oh, sure, push them up and down. But, of course, they were all born. The youngest one was three and my brother, uh, my sister was five years old, so they, needless to say...

SIGRIST: They weren't so little any more.

LAMBERT: They weren't so little any more, no.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

LAMBERT: No, but I, of course I, I was thinking of that the other day, that she was five years old. So she, I was nine years older so naturally I was always minding somebody's kids.

SIGRIST: What was the hardest thing for you to get adjusted to in America?

EI-612/LAMBERT

LAMBERT: I know. Some of the jobs. Oh, I was thinking of my brother Albert on Ellis Island. It must have been a, a barrier or something anyway. He must have fell through to the second floor. And I don't know what happened. I, I, this old lady, she was Italian, I guess. Tried to get someone from downstairs. She was, he was on the second floor. There must have been a hole someplace, or maybe some kind of a barrier because he was down on the second floor. It's a wonder he didn't kill himself.

SIGRIST: Your poor mother had so much to worry about...

LAMBERT: Oh! Oh, didn't she. You'd be surprised.

SIGRIST: What did your mother do when she first came to America?

LAMBERT: Oh, oh, oh, after a while, oh, there was a war on the next, next year.

SIGRIST: That was the First World War.

LAMBERT: 1914, World War One. I remember that very well.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me what you remember about the war period.

LAMBERT: Well, my, my mother got a job, a little bit of a job in, in the (?), and my brothers, too, yeah. So we escaped, we escaped the war. The war broke out in 1913 [sic, 1914], and I was fourteen when I came.

SIGRIST: What did your mother do? What kind of job did she get when...

LAMBERT: Oh, you know, working on ammunition, ammunition, you know, (?), bullets, what have you. I worked a little bit on the war jobs, too.

SIGRIST: What, what, how did the war affect your family at home?

LAMBERT: Not too much. In fact, it didn't seem to bother them too much. But it wouldn't affect us here because the war was in England and we were here. Oh, except there were rations for food. They couldn't get any food in England. My mother would send a package of food over.

EI-612/LAMBERT

SIGRIST: To her family over there.

LAMBERT: To anyone, to my grandmother, you know, chocolate puddings and stuff that could be, that would keep, you know. Odds and ends, I don't know what. I don't know if she had any sugar or not. Oh, we were rationed over here for sugar for a long time. I don't know if it was another war, I don't know if it was World War Two later on. My son was, my son was only two years old when that second war broke out.

SIGRIST: Tell me, did anyone ever make fun of you because you were a foreigner?

LAMBERT: No, because we were English. But anybody else that come over, Polish or anything, they look down on them. Not any more. (unintelligible) But you see, we were practically in the same, same country because they were English here mostly. They came originally from Plymouth, you know, and all that. No, they didn't look down at us at all. They were very, very, very nice.

SIGRIST: When you got the jobs and you were making some money,

did you have to contribute your money to your parents?

LAMBERT: Oh, they took it all. Right up until, they might give me a, a shilling or something for a week. And what clothes I needed, they would buy. Oh, they took it all. Oh, sure, right along. And my sister's, and that.

SIGRIST: Did people wear different kind, a different kind of clothing in America than they had in England?

LAMBERT: No, it was more or less the same, it was. I'm trying to think. Except the velvet suit. And my sister was, had on a pretty blue dress when she came over. I remember that. And George, I don't know what George wore. That's the baby, he was the baby.

SIGRIST: What year did you get married?

LAMBERT: Oh, '32.

SIGRIST: 1932.

LAMBERT: Yes. I was, I was, when Walter was born I was forty years old. There's forty years difference between Walter and me. Can you imagine? Or thirty nine.

SIGRIST: How did you meet your husband?

LAMBERT: Well, my sister told me about him. He, he lived in Brooklyn. He had a room in Brooklyn. And he must have come up and worked up here temporary because his sister was up here. And he, she was, oh, anyway, he sent me a, what do you call it, a Valentine's card. Didn't say who was on it. He just said somebody (unintelligible), I don't know. But I guessed who it was because Lillie told it. And, you know, I still have that Valentine today, after all these years.

SIGRIST: Where was your husband born?

LAMBERT: Oh, Brooklyn. I think it was Brooklyn.

SIGRIST: So he was American.

LAMBERT: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What was his background?

LAMBERT: Oh, German and, and his mother was, his mother wasn't German. It was, oh God, I think it's Swedish. So it was Swedish (unintelligible). But he was German, German descent. I know that much.

SIGRIST: Did your parents like him?

LAMBERT: (misunderstanding) Did they like me?

SIGRIST: Did they like your husband? How did your parents feel about your husband?

LAMBERT: I don't think they were too crazy about him, to tell you the truth. But they got along all right. He didn't live very long, my husband, as far as that goes. He was only fifty. I think he was fifty nine when he died.

SIGRIST: How long had you been married when that happened?

EI-612/LAMBERT

LAMBERT: Well, if I got married in '32, I, I was, uh, I'm trying to separate that from '32. If he died at fifty nine and, and I'm trying to figure out how much older he was than me.

SIGRIST: But he was older than you?

LAMBERT: Oh, he was older. I think he was about four years older.

SIGRIST: Four years older.

LAMBERT: Yeah, I'm almost sure it was four years older. I was born in 1899. I think he was born in 1894. If I was home, I could look at the papers and remember, but I...

SIGRIST: You're doing a great job. You have a good memory.

LAMBERT: ...haven't got any papers here at all. They're all home.

SIGRIST: Well, that's okay. Tell me, did you become a citizen

EI-612/LAMBERT

of the United States?

LAMBERT: Oh, my father got to be a citizen as fast as he could. You got to be here five years before you can be a citizen. But my brother Freddie couldn't because he went to Canada in the mean time, so he had to wait and be a citizen later. But all the rest of us was made citizens. We got the papers home.

SIGRIST: Why did, why did Freddie go to Canada?

LAMBERT: I don't know. For some reason or the other, he got a job there. I don't know what for. I never did find out. And then the lady he married, eventually she came from, from up the line, too, from Canada, some place up there.

SIGRIST: When, have you been back to England?

LAMBERT: Oh, yeah. When I was seventy-three I went back to England. And that's, I saw more of England when I went back than I did in the whole time I lived there.

SIGRIST: Did you go back to the town where you were born?

LAMBERT: Yeah, we took a picture of my, my grandson and me in front of my grandmother's house. And I'll be damned, the picture didn't come out. Wasn't that a disappointment?

SIGRIST: Oh. How did you feel when you saw your grandmother's house? How did it make you feel?

LAMBERT: Just, just the same. I said, "There she lived." She lived there for so long. Of course, she lived there when it was first built. And her house was modern compared to ours. She had some kind of a bath tub upstairs. And the water is in a tank upstairs, entirely different from our house. But they still didn't have a stove. It was some kind of an open fireplace, and it was easier living here, my God, they haven't got, they haven't got a stove. But my grandmother's house, I just loved it there. he was so, she was so good.

SIGRIST: Do you think of yourself as being English or American?

EI-612/LAMBERT

LAMBERT: No, but you always, well, you always know your English, no. You're in America so be American. That's the way I say it. You should. It's so close to England anyway. But I was, but when I went to England this time, I went by plane. I didn't have to go on a boat.

SIGRIST: That's right.

LAMBERT: And I didn't have to go to Ellis Island. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Do you have any advice for young people on how to live their lives successfully?

LAMBERT: Well, you can't really tell them. Some, some are real good and they know how to work. And others just don't give a damn about anybody or anything. You know what I mean.

SIGRIST: What would you tell them to help them live their life better? (a knock can be heard)

LAMBERT: No, I don't know. I don't know exactly how to word it.

EI-612/LAMBERT

You see, you could go to church but I only went to chapel. But later on I never went to chapel so much in later years. But, but I did used to go every Sunday.

SIGRIST: I see.

LAMBERT: In England, I used to go every Sunday, too.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Lambert, we need to end now but I thank you very much for letting me ask you questions.

LAMBERT: Well, I hope I managed all right. I was afraid I wouldn't, see? Whether I missed something important, I don't know.

SIGRIST: You did a great job. You have a wonderful, wonderful memory.

LAMBERT: But I always remember my brother, how, why he fell into that room downstairs, to this day I've been trying to figure it out.

SIGRIST: Well, that's, that's an interesting story, I must say.

EI-612/LAMBERT

LAMBERT: Yeah, well, I figured, I got a feeling that there must have been a hole down there of some kind and he just dropped right down.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist, signing off with Gladys Lambert on Tuesday, May 2nd, 1995 at the Homestead Residence in Darien, Connecticut [sic, Stamford Connecticut].

LAMBERT: I'm so glad to talk to you.