

EI-613

MARY CATHERINE THERESA BOYLE KELLY

BIRTH DATE: JANUARY 21, 1911

INTERVIEW DATE: MAY 2, 1995

RUNNING TIME: 23:14

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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INTERVIEW LOCATION: HOMESTEAD HEALTH CENTER
STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED AND REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 4/1998

IRELAND, 1929

AGE 18

PASSAGE ON "THE BALTIC"

SIGRIST: Good afternoon, this is Paul Sigrist for the National
Park Service. Today is Tuesday, May 2nd, 1995. I am
at the Homestead Residence in Darien....

TUMPANE: Health Center.

SIGRIST: Home...

TUMPANE: Health Center.

SIGRIST: Health Center.

TUMPANE: In Stamford.

SIGRIST: Homestead Health Center in Stamford...

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TUMPANE: Stamford.

SIGRIST: ...with Mary Catherine Theresa Boyle Kelly.

KELLY: (laughing, to Ms. Tumpane): That's your fault.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Kelly, Mrs. Kelly came from Ireland in 1929 when she was eighteen years old. Present also in the room is the administrator Terry Tumpane. Mrs. Kelly, can we begin by you giving me your birth date, please.

KELLY: January 21st.

SIGRIST: And what year?

KELLY: 1911. (microphone disturbance)

SIGRIST: 1911. You might not want to play with the wire there, just so that...

KELLY: No, it's wrapped in my elbow.

SIGRIST: Okay. Where in Ireland were you born?

KELLY: In the county of Roscommon.

SIGRIST: And what was the name of the town?

KELLY: Well, the town, we were in three towns. I'll give you
Cloonfad.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that please?

KELLY: (laughing) I'm so long here maybe I've forgotten how
to spell it. C-L-double O-N-F-A-D.

SIGRIST: And can you tell me a little bit about what the town
looked like when you were a child?

KELLY: It was nice when I was a child. The stores were very
nice, and so were the owners.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what it looked like?

KELLY: What it looked like?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

KELLY: It was like, it looked like any nice little country town.

SIGRIST: What kind of buildings were in this town?

KELLY: Uh, store buildings, shops and, it was very nice.

SIGRIST: Is there one particular building that sticks out in your mind as a child from this town?

KELLY: Well, there are three of them. There's the Post Office, Fitzmorris'[ph] and Burke's [ph].

SIGRIST: And what was Fitzmorris'[ph] ?

KELLY: It was anything you wanted on earth, between clothing and food. They had everything in that, in that store.

SIGRIST: And what was Burke's [ph] ?

KELLY: Burke's [ph] was a, was a grocery store, carried all you needed or you wanted.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what your house looked like?

KELLY: What my house looked like?

SIGRIST: Yes. What did your house look like in Ireland?

KELLY: It was a nice, clean, little thatched house.

SIGRIST: What was it built out of?

KELLY: Stone.

SIGRIST: And what kind of....

KELLY: And we, and we used to whitewash it twice a year, in the spring and again in the, for Christmas it would be done if there was no snow on the ground.

SIGRIST: So it's being whitewashed on the outside of the stone.

KELLY: Yes.

SIGRIST: And what about the inside?

KELLY: The inside was also whitewashed.

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SIGRIST: What kind of floor did you have?

KELLY: Cement.

SIGRIST: What kind of lighting did you have in the house?

KELLY: Uh, oil, oil and candles.

SIGRIST: Where did you get the candles?

KELLY: In the stores.

SIGRIST: You bought the candles?

KELLY: You bought the candles and you bought the oil and you had to, an oil lamp that hung on the wall with a nice black, uh, a nice aluminum back to it and you kept that clean and it was brightly shining.

SIGRIST: And how did you heat the house?

KELLY: Excuse me?

SIGRIST: How did you heat the house?

KELLY: How do we keep it?

SIGRIST: How did you heat, heat the house? (an intercom can be heard in the background)

KELLY: Heat. Fires, turf fires.

SIGRIST: Can you explain to me how you burned turf?

KELLY: Turf. You made a fire. How do you, how do you, how do you make a fire on the outside or the inside whenever you make a fire? You have coals, you, and from those you, you build up around them and you make a nice big fire for yourself.

SIGRIST: Explain to me what turf is.

KELLY: Aye, Mother Macree! It's a sod that's crushed and dried, cut in, in turf sods like about this width (she gestures) and this length...

SIGRIST: That's about seven inches by...

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KELLY: By five inches, whatever, and that you had to, to take care of that, preserve it 'til it was dry and ready for taking home to, for fire, for fire.

SIGRIST: And where did turf come from?

KELLY: From the earth!

SIGRIST: Was it on your property that you...

KELLY: Yes, it was on our property. And if not, you, you rented a certain area. We never had to. We had it. We had enough turf fires.

SIGRIST: And whose job was it in the family to prepare the turf?

KELLY: My father, he should rest in peace.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

KELLY: John.

SIGRIST: And tell me what he did for a living in Ireland.

KELLY: He was a farmer. What does farmers do?

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did he raise?

KELLY: (she sighs) Potatoes, cabbage, onions. You name it,
we had it.

SIGRIST: Did you have livestock?

KELLY: Yes, we did.

SIGRIST: What kinds did you have?

KELLY: We had cows that gave milk and we had cows, animals
that we just raised for sale.

SIGRIST: Is there a story that you remember from your childhood
about one of the animals that you had on the farm?

KELLY: (to Ms. Tumpane): What one is that that I told
you?

TUMPANE: The duck one.

KELLY: Huh?

TUMPANE: You told me some stories about the ducks.

KELLY: The duck?

TUMPANE: Hum.

KELLY: I wonder what happen--, uh, I forget. (to Mr. Sigrist)
How do you expect me to remember everything. I'm only,
I'm only eighty nine [sic, eighty four at the time of
this interview] years old and he expects me to, to
remember everything that happened when I was
eighteen.

SIGRIST: You're doing just fine.

TUMPANE: You're doing great, Mare.

SIGRIST: What kind of food did you eat on the farm?

KELLY: (laughing) What do you usually eat!? We're not
animals. We ate.

SIGRIST: But a hundred years from now nobody will know what you ate on the farm.

TUMPANE: It could be different, Mare.

SIGRIST: It will be different. So what kinds of food did you eat on the farm?

KELLY: Well, we had bread that we baked ourselves. We had our milk that God gave the cow and, uh, we sowed, we sowed all our own, all our own, uh, what would you call them anyhow? You're driving me nuts. (Ms. Tumpane laughs)

TUMPANE: (misunderstanding): Your clothes, Mare?

KELLY: We had, we had to plant the potato seeds in order to get potatoes. We had to, all, all the things were done by seed in the springtime. And then in the fall you reaped your goal.

SIGRIST: What, what, who did the planting of the seeds? Was that, was that work that a man did or work that a woman

did?

KELLY: All right, a man did it.

SIGRIST: What kinds of work did women do on the farm?

KELLY: Whatever they were able to do. You did your work with your husband, whatever, you helped him out.

SIGRIST: What were some of your mother's chores on the farm?

KELLY: (she sighs) What? Well, when the harvest came and they started to cut the corn she used to, I don't know what they call anyhow. I don't know. It had a name but I don't remember it.

SIGRIST: What she's cooking had a name? Is that...?

KELLY: No, what you asked what they, if they helped on the farm. And, and in the springtime yes. They put the potato seeds in for the potatoes. That was one thing they did. And there wasn't much else they could do. Oh yes, they took care of the turf for our fires. They used to spread the turf this way and that way 'til

you got it dry because you cut it from the earth, sopping
 wet. And it had to be dried if the weather was good,
 it was. And whatever had to be done with the turf,
my mother used to do it.

SIGRIST: What kinds of chores did children have on the farm?

KELLY: Well, see, if they were apt to do anything, there were
 no chores for them to do. And then, when they did,
 they would gather the ducks in the evening or gather
 the chickens in the evening and put them away for the
 night.

SIGRIST: What kinds of games did you play as a child?

KELLY: Hopscotch. And, what do you call them? What do you
 call it when you play with the...(she gestures)

SIGRIST: Marbles?

KELLY: Marbles, yeah.

TUMPANE: I was thinking jacks.

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KELLY: Jacks?

TUMPANE: Jacks?

KELLY: Jack.

SIGRIST: Did you have a toy that you remember when you were a child?

KELLY: Well, one toy wasn't much good amongst us seven. So we had to have toys, whatever they consisted of, I really don't remember right now.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

KELLY: My mother's name was Hannah. My father's name was John.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's maiden name?

KELLY: Concannon.

SIGRIST: (misspelling): C-O-N-C-O-N-N-A-N.

KELLY: Con! Cannon!

SIGRIST: Oh, the other was around.

KELLY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: C-O-N-C-A-N-N-O-N.

TUMPANE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you know about your mother's background?

KELLY: (she laughs) Where are you taking me to? What do I, what do I need, need to know about my mother's background? The Lord, the Lord rest her and give her peace.

TUMPANE: You know why, Mary? This is so years from now, hundreds of years from now people can know about you and about people that came from Ireland and what it was like...

KELLY: And a lot of good it's going to do me years from now.

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TUMPANE: But it's something that, how many times do we sit
and talk about it 'cause I love to hear about it.
So tell us about your mother. She was born in a
little town, right? In Ireland, you said?

KELLY: She was born where?

TUMPANE: In a little town in Ireland.

KELLY: No, she was not.

TUMPANE: Where was she born.

KELLY: She was born on a farm, just like I was.

SIGRIST: In the same part of Ireland?

KELLY: In the next village.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

KELLY: Really, I, being honest with you, I do not know. This
is going back a little.

SIGRIST: When you were a...

KELLY: I, I don't know is it, is it that they met or there was, there was a match making deal. I do not now know. I never did and I don't suppose I ever will.

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

KELLY: Not much. What, what could you know about America?

SIGRIST: Well, how did you think about America?

KELLY: How did I know it to think anything of it!

SIGRIST: Did you have family that was in America?

KELLY: No, I did not. I had cousins, yes, but none, none on my own side.

SIGRIST: Why did you want to go to America?

KELLY: Because my cousin was going and if she could go why

couldn't I go.

SIGRIST: Was she the same age that you were?

KELLY: She was the same age but did you come to America with me? That's the way she came with me.

TUMPANE: (whispering to Mr. Sigrist) She didn't come with her.

SIGRIST: She didn't, she didn't go with you.

KELLY: Nope, never came.

SIGRIST: Why didn't she go with you?

TUMPANE: (Mrs. Kelly sighs) Tell him, Mare. It's a good story.

KELLY: If, if I knew it, I would tell you. I, do you know why? I don't, and I guess I never will. I don't know if she's still here or not.

SIGRIST: So you were expecting her to go with you and then she

backed out.

KELLY: Right.

SIGRIST: How did you...

KELLY: We did, we did everything together other than going to Dublin for our physical and whatever you had to go through. She never came with me that morning and that was enough.

SIGRIST: How did your parents feel about you going to America?

KELLY: Not too good.

SIGRIST: What, what did they object to?

KELLY: Leaving, because I was only eighteen.

SIGRIST: Had you been working in Ireland before you came?

KELLY: No.

SIGRIST: You didn't have a job in Ireland.

KELLY: No.

SIGRIST: No. What do you remember packing before you left?

KELLY: Packing?

SIGRIST: Yes. What did you take with you to America?

KELLY: Clothing, like everybody else takes. We, we did have clothes. And good clothes, I mean.

SIGRIST: And what did they look like? Describe the clothes that you wore.

TUMPANE: (Mrs. Kelly sighs) It's for history, Mare. Come on.

KELLY: They were rags, and a little bit of bag thrown in. Describe it. Clothing! What kind of clothing would you have?

SIGRIST: Did you wear pants or a dress?

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KELLY: A dress, of course, and...

SIGRIST: And how long was the dress?

KELLY: Regular length. How long would it be? (she gestures)

SIGRIST: You're pointing to about your knee.

KELLY: About.

SIGRIST: And where did you get the clothes?

KELLY: In a store.

SIGRIST: Well, that's interesting. Your mother didn't make your clothes.

KELLY: No, she didn't. She made enough of other things but she didn't make my clothes to come to New York.

SIGRIST: Where did you leave from to go to the United States?

KELLY: From the county of Roscommon.

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SIGRIST: Yes, but what port did you leave from?

KELLY: (she sighs) What port? I don't know.

SIGRIST: Where did you go to get on the ship?

KELLY: I don't know, I don't know. (she whispers) From the
county of Roscommon. (in full voice) I really don't
know where, where we got on the ship. (microphone
disturbance)

TUMPANE: (to Mrs. Kelly) Don't pull on that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying good bye to your family?

KELLY: Yes, I do. At the train station.

SIGRIST: They went with you to the train station.

KELLY: Yes.

SIGRIST: And how did you feel about leaving your family?

KELLY: I was, everything was fine leaving 'til I got here and

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I knew I couldn't go back anymore, 'til, 'til. Then
it wasn't so nice. I had wished many, many times, many
nights I went to bed and cried myself sick.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the ship that you came to
America on?

KELLY: I think it was the S.S. Baltic, I think.

SIGRIST: And how long of a voyage was it? How long did it take
to get...

KELLY: About seven days.

SIGRIST: And what sticks out in your mind about that voyage?

KELLY: That I had a good time.

SIGRIST: And what did you do?

KELLY: Anything that went, that was going I went.

SIGRIST: Can you be specific about what was going on? (Mrs.
Kelly sighs heavily)

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TUMPANE: Mare, Mare, remember...

KELLY: Listen, this is going back, going back, back, back! I mean I, I can't remember what was going on when I was eighteen. I'm eighty some odd years now and you expect me to remember then!?

TUMPANE: Mare, Mare, it's not to get upset. If you want to stop, we'll stop.

SIGRIST: We can stop.

TUMPANE: But remember how you always tell me about the dancing. This gentleman just wants to know what you did to enjoy yourself. You used to tell me the stories about how you would dance and how you drank a little too much and had the best time. That's all. He, he just wants to know what you did on the ship.

KELLY: What did I, what did I tell you?

TUMPANE: About dancing and staying up late and really

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having a very good time. What did you do on the
ship to occupy yourself? It was a long trip.

KELLY: On the ship?

TUMPANE: Yeah.

KELLY: Anything and everything that was going, I did it.

TUMPANE: Did they have dances?

KELLY: Yes, and I did.

TUMPANE: Any drinking going on?

KELLY: Well, if there was I didn't see it and I don't know.

TUMPANE: Yeah. What else did you do? Did you meet
people?

KELLY: Of course, all the passengers that were on board with
me. There were people.

TUMPANE: Yeah.

KELLY: Yes.

TUMPANE: Anybody in particular?

KELLY: Yeah, there was one fellow that came from the same,
that registered, whatever you call it, with the same
agent that I did...

TUMPANE: Uh huh.

KELLY: ...on my passport.

TUMPANE: From Ireland?

KELLY: From Ireland.

TUMPANE: Uh huh. Did you travel with him all the way across?

KELLY: Yes.

TUMPANE: Yeah.

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KELLY: But I never did see him after we came here. Never.

TUMPANE: No. Did you meet anybody that you kept in touch with?

KELLY: No, nobody. I mean to keep in touch, you, you can keep in touch but they never, they never bother to reply of anything so I dropped it, too. If they could, so could I.

TUMPANE: Did you get seasick on the ship?

KELLY: No, I didn't. But I got seasick after I went, not too long here. I was laid up with rheumatics.

TUMPANE: Once you got here, you got sick.

KELLY: Huh?

TUMPANE: You got sick once you were here in the United States?

KELLY: Yes. My legs were all swollen, my hands. And I had to have my tonsils, I came here in April and I had to have my tonsils removed I think it was either September or October. They were supposed to be completely rotten.

Whether they were or not, I don't know.

TUMPANE: But you got a physical before you left, right?

KELLY: Yes.

TUMPANE: And they said you were fine.

KELLY: Yes.

TUMPANE: And then you got sick.

KELLY: So, I mustn't be, my, my, my tonsils mustn't be fine if they were, if they were completely rotten before October.

TUMPANE: Uh huh. When you got to the United States, where did you land? (Mrs. Kelly laughs) In the boat, where did the boat come in?

KELLY: (laughing) Somewheres in Manhattan.

TUMPANE: Somewheres. (they laugh)

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SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

KELLY: Well, we passed by it.

TUMPANE: What did you think of that?

KELLY: It was tall, tall, tall.

TUMPANE: Did it symbolize anything to you...

KELLY: Eh, no...

TUMPANE: Or did you not know?

KELLY: ...nothing, nothing symbolized anything to me. I
didn't know where I was going and I didn't know, oh,
please.

TUMPANE: You were kind of young and foolish, huh?

KELLY: I was eighteen.

SIGRIST: When you landed in New York, did you have to undergo
any kind of medical exams?

KELLY: Oh, you were checked out, I imagine, before you got off the boat.

SIGRIST: Did anyone, was anyone there to meet you when you landed?

KELLY: My cousin was there. She should rest in peace.

SIGRIST: And where did she take you?

KELLY: To her home in New York.

SIGRIST: And did you see anything in New York City that you had never seen before?

KELLY: Well, there was a lot of things in New York that I had never seen before, but don't ask me to go back and tell you now what they were then. (Mr. Sigrist and Ms. Tumpane laugh)

SIGRIST: Was New York City different than Ireland had been?

KELLY: Yes, it was a city. I lived in the country, nice green

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fields and white, white washed houses and roses around
the doors.

SIGRIST: What was the first job that you got?

KELLY: Housework.

SIGRIST: How long had you been here?

KELLY: Maybe a month or six weeks.

SIGRIST: And had you been sick during that time?

KELLY: No.

SIGRIST: That wasn't the time that you were sick when you first
arrived.

KELLY: No, I think, I think that December I think was when I
had my tonsils removed.

SIGRIST: When you say "housework," what do you mean?

KELLY: Housework! What, what does housework remind you of!?

Now, I mean...

TUMPANE: Well, Mare, were you cleaning...

SIGRIST: Were you taking care of children or cleaning or...

KELLY: I was, both. We did both.

TUMPANE: And how long, you did the housekeeping for only a short time, though, right?

KELLY: And what else did I do?

TUMPANE: Didn't you get another job with a different family?

KELLY: Yeah, but it was also housework.

TUMPANE: But didn't you become a nanny?

KELLY: Yes. I was a nanny from the beginning. You took care of the child and you did the housework.

TUMPANE: So you did everything.

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KELLY: Well, was, the next place I went to, I think, there was, there was three children and housework and you did from floor to, from ceiling to floors, everything.

SIGRIST: Were you treated well by the people who, who employed you?

KELLY: Yes, they were.

TUMPANE: How much did they pay you, Mary?

KELLY: Oh, God...

TUMPANE: I remember you telling me this.

KELLY: What did I tell you? I, as, as compared to now little or nothing. Little or nothing.

SIGRIST: Did anyone else from your family come over to America?

KELLY: No, no. They came to visit but not to stay.

SIGRIST: Did either of your parents ever come to visit?

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KELLY: No, no.

SIGRIST: No.

KELLY: I went there.

SIGRIST: Were you communicating with your parents?

KELLY: Yes, I, to this day I do, too, with whoever is there.
My parents aren't left anymore, but I have sisters.

TUMPANE: How many times did you go back to Ireland, Mary?

KELLY: Twice.

TUMPANE: Twice.

SIGRIST: How did you feel the first time you went back?

KELLY: Good.

SIGRIST: Did it look the same to you?

KELLY: Pretty much, pretty much. Ireland will be Ireland

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regardless of who comes or goes. The green fields and the thatched, well, there are not that many thatched houses anymore.

SIGRIST: Did you become a citizen?

KELLY: Of course.

SIGRIST: Yes. Do you remember how old you were...

KELLY: Look, I lived, I lived with a husband, he should rest in peace, either you, you did it or you, he was up on everything. He was a citizen and if he was a citizen, I had to be a citizen.

SIGRIST: Was he Irish?

KELLY: Of course.

SIGRIST: From Ireland?

KELLY: We, we were both imported from Ireland.

SIGRIST: Had he been here about the same amount of time as you?

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KELLY: No, I think he was here before me awhile.

SIGRIST: I see.

KELLY: There was, I think there was only six of them here, so
he was one of six that was here.

TUMPANE: What did John [i.e. Mrs. Kelly's husband] do for a
living, Mary? I forgot.

KELLY: Huh?

TUMPANE: What did John do for a job?

KELLY: He worked for Borden's Milk Company.

SIGRIST: And his name was John? John, John Kelly.

TUMPANE: (to Mrs. Kelly) Just like your father John. (a pause)

SIGRIST: (to Ms. Tumpane) Do you have anymore questions?

TUMPANE: I don't think so.

SIGRIST: Mary, do you think of yourself as being Irish or as being America?

KELLY: I think of me, myself as what I am. I, I don't refer to Irish or American. I'm a person.

TUMPANE: Mary, one question, though. You and I have talked about this. (Mrs. Kelly sighs) When you first came here, you really realized you missed home but yet...

KELLY: Well...

TUMPANE: ...you went back and you returned to the United States. Did you ever think about staying in Ireland?

KELLY: No, how could I, I had Kath--, I had my daughter with me, so, for the first time...

TUMPANE: Because you didn't go back until after you were married, right?

KELLY: Of course. I wasn't that long here, (she laughs) that long here 'til I was married.

TUMPANE: All right, Mare.

SIGRIST: Mary, thank you very much for letting me ask you the questions. I appreciate it. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Mary Kelly on May 2nd, 1995, with Terry Tumpane...

KELLY: (to Ms. Tumpane) Are you going to take me back to my room?

TUMPANE: Yes, I'll take you back.

SIGRIST: ...in attendance. Thank you.