

EI-771

JAMES JOSEPH WALLS

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AGE 12

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LEVINE: Today is July 20, 1996, and I'm here in Fort Lee, New Jersey, with Mr. James Joseph Walls, who came from Ireland, Northern Ireland, in January of 1930, when he was twelve years of age. Also with us today is Mr. Walls' daughter, Sheila. And I think, well, why don't we start with your name. (she laughs) Was there ever another name that you used?

WALLS: Not legally. My names is James J. Walls, of course, but all I am known by is Joe. Now, the story attached to Joe is when I was being baptized my mother was ill, and she wanted me to be called Joseph. But my father went to the church to be christened, and he wanted me to be called James.

So he asserted himself (he laughs) and I was called James, James Joseph. My mother said, "Well, he might be James Joseph legally, but he'll always be Joe to me." Period. (he laughs)

LEVINE: And your birth date? What was your birth date?

WALLS: 4-25-17.

LEVINE: And, uh, where in Ireland were you born?

WALLS: Belfast.

LEVINE: And did you live in Belfast up until the time you left for this country?

WALLS: Yes.

LEVINE: So the first, the first questions will be around, in and around Belfast.

WALLS: And Oprahove[ph].

LEVINE: Okay. Um, so, let's see. You were twelve years old, so you probably were in school.

WALLS: Correct, yeah.

LEVINE: And, uh, well, let's, let's first start with your

family, actually. What was your mother's name?

WALLS: Mary.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

WALLS: Creen, C-R-E-E-N.

LEVINE: Okay. And your father's name?

WALLS: John.

LEVINE: And did you have sisters and brothers in Ireland?

WALLS: Yes.

LEVINE: What were their names, starting at the top.

WALLS: Kathleen, David, Jack, Willie, Joe, Sheila, Archie, Sheila, Claire and Paul.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, wait a minute, where did you fit in there?

WALLS: I was in the middle. Four older and four younger.

LEVINE: Okay. So, had any of your immediate family come to this country before you did?

WALLS: Well, my father was a seaman, so he had been here

on numerous occasions, you know, in the different ports on the ships, all right?

LEVINE: Okay. So would he, he would go away for periods of time.

WALLS: Correct, yes.

LEVINE: And then . . .

WALLS: But we always had a rather keen interest in America because we lived in a neighborhood that was called Sailor Town, and it was where all the ships used to come in, right? And, uh, it was, uh, very cosmopolitan. And we knew, like, uh, all the Indian sailors would come in, English sailors would come in, everybody. This was quite a, quite a very busy port, Belfast, okay? I think at that time the population of Belfast was approximately half a million. And I think I told you a little bit on the telephone, it was one of the biggest ship building areas in the whole world at that time. I told you, that's where the Titanic was built. And it was quite a maritime, uh, area. And, of course, we kids, we always hung around the ships, and we knew all about Americans. We always, Americans

were always very generous, too, you know? And, uh, if you did a little message for them or something like that, they would always give you a little tip, you know? And, uh, as kids we knew, if they needed their shoes to be repaired, we'd take their shoes and get them repaired. We'd always get a meal down on the ships, too, you know? And, of course, in those days a meal was very, very important because times were hard, right? It was, uh, you know, in the late '20s, and the depression was just about setting in then, you know? So we had a good knowledge of America, and we had a great love for America which I think was most important, because we knew the American people were good. And, uh, I guess the inkling to go to America was always in my heart anyhow.

LEVINE: Really? From the time you were a little boy you thought about that?

WALLS: Yeah. I think perhaps it was instilled in me through, uh, some relatives. Some lady, by the name, I think, was Mrs. Shields. When I was about three she wanted to take me to America with her, right? Of course, my mother wouldn't hear of it.

Then when I was five my Aunt Jenny, who was in this country, she wanted to take me with her, right, to America, and again my mother wouldn't hear of it, right?

LEVINE: Why you?

WALLS: I don't know. (he laughs) I was kind of an aggressive kid, you know? But then when my cousin John, he was a veteran from World War One, and he was at a reunion of his army group over in Paris, so he came from Paris, and he came to see my father, his cousin, right? So, of course, like all the (?), they make you welcome, you know, and treated him royally, and, uh, I kind of hung onto him a little bit, and showed him around a little bit, the neighborhoods and things like that.

LEVINE: With an idea?

WALLS: Yes, yes. (he laughs) I was calculating. (he laughs) So before he left I asked him if he would take me to America, right? And he said he could think about it. So he asked my mother and father would they let me go. They said that they would think about it. So I pestered and pestered and

pestered, and finally I got on the quota. They had a quota in those days, only so many allowed, you know? So after about a year of being on the quota, then I was allowed to come, right? But, uh . . .

LEVINE: Where was your uncle, between the time that he had come from Paris, and . . .

WALLS: Well, he stayed in Belfast for a while, you know, with my father and my mother, and my mother's relatives, and there's my father's relatives. And he came back to New York, you know? He was born here, you know?

LEVINE: I see. So he was here while you were hoping to come?

WALLS: Yes, correct, yeah. So finally he sent me the money, and I told him I would pay him back, you know? And, which I eventually did, right? But he was a good person. And I came to him. But it was sad, very sad, leaving, you know?

LEVINE: Yeah. What was this uncle's name?

WALLS: John Ward. I was back there recently and, uh, as a matter of fact, the fellow who gave me that

picture, with my wife and I, yeah, and he said, "Joe," he said. "I remember the day, it was a Friday," he said. "And you came around to school and," he said, I was off school doing things, you know? And he said, "You came around the school to say goodbye to everybody." (he laughs) He says there were tears in everybody's eyes. And, that was on a Friday. On a Sunday I left. We had to go down to the docks, and we had to take a tugboat out to the ship, because the big ship couldn't dock there at that time, because we had to take a ship out into the harbor, you know? And all my family were down there on a Sunday morning, everybody crying, "Joe's going to America."

LEVINE: Did you expect you'd be coming back, or did you think you were gone for good?

WALLS: Oh, I know I was going for good. I didn't rule out a visit back, but I knew, I was determined, because, I was very fortunate because I came from a very good mother and father, and I had good brothers and sisters. But times were rough, and my father had been severely hurt on the ships. And in those days you got no compensation or anything like

that. So times were rough, and I could always make a few dollars. I used to go and the farmers would bring their cows in from the country into Belfast prior to shipping them over to England, right? So the cows would be overnight in the cattle tents in Belfast, down near the docks. So the poor cows, they had to be milked, you know? So we kids go down there and, of course, it was in a Protestant area, but I could get in, I was a little aggressive, and I was able to get in there. I would milk cows, and then I would sell some of that milk, and it would make a few shillings for my mother, you know? And Jack, my older brother Jack, he was the only one who was working, and, uh, his salary in those days was five shillings a well. And, of course, the rent was only seven shillings per week, right? So, uh, with the few shillings I'd make and the few shillings Jack would make, we managed a little bit. But I knew that I had to come to America, and I figured I could do better for my mother. Even though I was only twelve, I knew some years might elapse, but it was in my heart and soul that I would do better for my mother from America, all right? So, uh, thanks be to God,

it worked out that way. It worked out that way. I just, I think, I don't like to be theatrical, but, uh, it was just a great blessing, three particular blessings, from my coming to America, was, number one, meeting my beloved wife, right?

LEVINE: You met her here?

WALLS: Oh, yeah. She's a true American. (he laughs) Then my three beautiful children, right? And through them my beloved grandchildren, right? And, thirdly, the great assistance that I was able, I don't like to be saying it, putting it that way it sounds like I'm bragging, but it was only because of the fact that I got the opportunity in America to help my mother and my, the rest of my family. They were able to get, further their own education, that they didn't have to go out and take a lot of silly old jobs, you know? So I have a lot of blessings.

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

WALLS: John.

LEVINE: John. And, uh, did you have grandparents around

Belfast?

WALLS: Uh, yes. I remember, uh, my maternal grandmother.

I don't remember my maternal grandfather, but he was a ship's chandler. That's, you know, going around the ships and supplying them with small items, you know? Like supplying them with ropes and lines, and different things that are used on the ships, you know? The, my grandmother, she was an illiterate lady, and she was the smartest woman you ever met. She had a, she had a business, she had restaurants, you know? Oh, she was brilliant.

But, uh, she came out here one time, she came out with her sister, because her son had been killed working on ships down in New York, in the Harbor. She came out for his burial, and things like that.

Yeah.

LEVINE: How was she with you? What, do you remember any experiences with her, with your grandmother?

WALLS: Nothing of any great significance. We always knew she was there, but, uh, I remember reading stories for her once, a few times, but nothing of any great significance. And, to be quite frank with you, I

read the stories hoping that I would get peace(?)
off a little bit. (he laughs) Yeah. It wasn't
out of the goodness of my heart. (he laughs)

LEVINE: How about your father's mother and father? Did you
ever notice . . .

WALLS: No. I don't remember them.

LEVINE: And you must have had aunts and uncles in Ireland?

WALLS: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah. We had, uh, my Aunt Katie,
that was my mother's older sister, she was married
to a man called Tom Flood, and he was the
stevedoring business. You know what stevedoring
is? Loading and unloading ships. And he was
reasonably affluent, you know? And, uh, Aunt Katie
was a generous lady. She would help. But, uh, my
mother was a very independent lady, and she didn't
seek much help, you know? But Aunt Katie was nice,
and my mother also had four, four other sisters.
They were all good ladies, nice ladies.

LEVINE: Did your mother have some qualities about her that
you particularly think of as Irish, or . . .

WALLS: Uh, no. My mother was very socialist-minded, very,

very socialist-minded, all right? Uh, and, uh, was not afraid to, uh, vocalize, you know? And, uh, she, uh, she was very good to us. She was, uh, not overly strict, but she was very firm, you know? We always remember her because she walked like this, you know? And we walked, I used to go to market with her, you know? And she'd take me out of school for half a day, and, uh, she wouldn't take any of the other brothers. She wanted me. And I always could do well with the markets, you know? I'd get a little bit extra, yeah, one way or another. But, uh, you walk along the street, she'd give you a slap in the back. "Straighten up! Straighten up!" You know? She, you had to walk like that for you. (he laughs) But she was very kind to all the people. She had nine children of her own. And I remember her, it was, uh, sort of a tenement building in, about a street away from us, and there were a lot of poor people living there. Like, it was about five stories high, and, uh, my mother used to tell me every so, every second or third day, "Go to so-and-so, Joe." You know, I was picking up babies' diapers, right? My mother would be washing diapers for people, you know? And

anything she got she shared with neighbors. She was a very, very generous woman, very generous.

LEVINE: Was she a religious person?

WALLS: She was, yeah, yeah. I recall, when I was leaving, that was Sunday, and I had a little party Saturday night, and it was snowing. But early Sunday morning she says, "Joe, let's go into the parlor."

The parlor was one of our bedrooms, right? So, and in the corner she had a little shrine to the Sacred Heart, you know? And she said, uh, she says, "I don't like to let you go." But, she said, "I think your mind is made up." And, she said, "I don't want to stand in your way if you feel you can do better, you know," she says, "we're going to let you go." She says, "Needless to say, we don't have anything to give you other than love, you know." And, uh, she said, "As you go throughout life, don't ever, for one moment, ever forget, put all your faith and hope and trust in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. She says, "Let that be your guideline for your whole life." You know? So we tried to adhere to that little bit of advice, you know? Yeah. She was a, she didn't wear her religion on

her sleeve, no way. And she would hit you as fast as she looked at you. (he laughs) But, uh, she was a very, very kind lady.

LEVINE: And how about your father?

WALLS: Oh, he was great, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Was he a religious, also, person?

WALLS: No, no. He was an ordinary man. And he, he was good to us. He . . .

LEVINE: Did he, did he spin you yarns about America the Free, and . . .

WALLS: Yeah. He would tell us about the, about the docks in America. And, needless to say, the sailors, when they got off the ships, they only got up to the first pub. (he laughs) But, uh, there was, we had a schoolteacher whose name was Mr. Deegan, John Deegan. He was a great man. And I remember in those days he would, we had, uh, we were very, very sophisticated and nonmaterial for teaching. We had one Bunsen burner. And he used to use the Bunsen burner to show, he'd be giving us a lecture on alcohol, right, and the evils of alcohol, right,

and he used to tell you how the alcohol would be consumed, go into your stomach. Then the vapors would finally come up into your brain, and your brain would be like a little cup, he said, "Raised in that cup." And he says, then, "The more it raised, the more inefficient you became." He says, "And then you were a drunk, and you were useless, right? Excuse me, boys, I have to go to the corner." And he'd go for a pint. (Dr. Levine laughs) But then he'd come out a lot to see my father, and some, in the evenings, you know, and they'd sit by the fire and they'd have a couple of pints, a pint of Guinesses, you know, and they'd spin yarns. But he was a great teacher. Oh, they were all great teachers. But, uh . . .

LEVINE: So, uh, let's see. Uh, what was school like? I mean, did you, did you continue in school once you got to this country?

WALLS: Oh, yes, definitely.

LEVINE: So, so, compare the school there, uh, to the, to what you experienced once you got here. What was it like over there?

WALLS: Well, I think, at that particular time I think they were a little more advanced than we were here, right? Yeah. Like, if you were in fifth grade you were studying Algebra and geometry, and, uh, you had your Gaelic language, and your English language, of course, right? You had penmanship, you had composition, you had, you had your music, singing, right? Uh, reading, writing, spelling, composition. And I guess that was, that was about it. Oh, I came here, it was, uh, I had a little difficulty, because I didn't know American history, I didn't know American geography, you know? So I had a lot to catch up to do, right? But we made out all right in school here.

LEVINE: Was it more strict or, uh, were you going to a Catholic school, or . . .

WALLS: Yes.

LEVINE: Both places?

WALLS: Yes, yeah. I was taught by the Christian brothers here.

LEVINE: And what about community life? What was the, what

was the social life for your mother and father when you were . . .

WALLS: Well, when my father was working it was reasonably good. They, uh, they'd go to the, they'd go to the pictures, they call it, the movies, like, once a week. Of course, there wasn't talkies in those days, you know? But, uh, they liked to go to the pictures. And then, uh, maybe they'd go into the bar later, you know? And, uh, my mother would take a glass of wine. My father would have a couple of beers. And it would always be, you could always go visit your relatives. You could walk in and have a chat with them, a cup of tea. It was nice. It was real, it was a nice community life, very nice. The sad part of it was the religious friction, you know? We were kind of, you say the word, ghettoized, you know? You lived in a, in a, you couldn't . . .

LEVINE: And this is Sailor Town?

WALLS: Yeah. That was Catholic, but with just a smattering of Protestants. But, uh, there were some bad districts, like Sandy Row was particularly

predominantly, well, not entirely Protestant. Shankle Road was entirely Protestant. See, two-thirds of the people in the Northern Ireland are Protestant, and one-third is Catholic, and the Catholics were persecuted, you know? You had, uh, no opportunity for work, even with your, even if you had an education, you know? The common rule of thumb was when you applied for work, and if you qualified, but before you were accepted, you know, they'd say, "Well, what school did you go to," you know? Well, I went to Earl Street. All right, well, that, that could be a little bit misleading. But they were smart, too. They'd say, well, "Which school of Earl Street?" See, there was one Protestant School, and a Catholic School. So I went to Lorell[ph] Street. Well, you didn't get the job. (he laughs) You were a Catholic, you didn't get the job. So you wind up trying to get jobs going to say. And, as a matter, I guess the best illustration would be, and, like, in Harlem and Woust[ph], the big shipyard where it's employed approximately thirty-two thousand people in its heyday, all Catholics were given the most menial jobs there was, like sweeping things, even if they

were good tradesmen they, they didn't get no opportunities. And, of course, that's why you have so much of the strife and so much fighting today. Catholics have been persecuted for so long, it's hard to get them to accept things the way they are.

LEVINE: Do you, does that, is that by way of saying that more of the Catholic population was immigrating?

WALLS: Pardon?

LEVINE: Was more of the Catholic population leaving Northern Ireland because of that?

WALLS: Oh, yes, oh, yes, oh, yeah. The circumstances compelled them to. Uh, there was, a lot of Catholics could make out good, but they were strictly the minority as far as getting ahead, you know?

LEVINE: Did you personally experience, uh, anti . . .

WALLS: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Feeling . . .

WALLS: Oh, yes. Like I told you, that little instance of going down to milk the cows, you know? Oh, I would

have to go through a, the outskirts of a Protestant neighborhood, you know, and the kids stopped, you know, "Hey, you Teg[ph], or what?" Teg[ph] meaning Catholic, right? And you got a fist fight right there and then. Oh, it was common. You had to fight a lot of times. But, uh, I guess when you're young you just accepted it, you know?

LEVINE: So, um, why was it that you decided to leave Northern Ireland at the time that you did?

WALLS: Well, being aware of the prejudice, right, and the unfair treatment that Catholics were subjected to, I felt that if I come to America I would, uh, do better, because I would be free from all that religious prejudice, you know? And I felt there was more opportunity. Of course, I didn't realize when I was coming to America that I was coming into the big Depression, you know? But, still in all, it worked out, you know?

LEVINE: So, uh, do you remember anything you took with you when you left?

WALLS: Yes, I do. Yeah. I, uh, you wore short pants, right? I was too young for what we call longies,

right, trousers. So I wore short pants. Sheila, would you please get me that book that, uh, Lisa made? I think it's in the far corner of the upper left, the upper left hand corner of that shelf. Uh, I didn't have a lot of clothing in my suitcase, just the underwear and a few shirts, you know? And, needless to say, my mother made sure I, the clothing I had was adequate and suitable and presentable, you know? And I wasn't ashamed of it, right? When I landed in America, I wasn't a bit ashamed of it, you know? I felt a little bit better than a lot of people on the ships, you know?

They probably came from even more stringent circumstances, perhaps, than I had come from. We never considered ourselves really poor. It was just, uh, unfortunate circumstances of the times, you know? And we always, but we come out of it, you know. But, uh, needless to say, when I came to America, then I had to get into knickerbockers. You know what knickerbockers are, right? So that was strange, getting into that kind of clothing, you know? But, you're young, you adjust very quickly, you know? And we called, uh, this would be a jersey, you know, assuming this is a sweater,

a sweater was a jersey over that, right, or a gansy[ph], right? So I had to learn that was a sweater, you know, or a pullover, or something like that. And the shirts, they had collars on, you know? Over there the collars were detached, you know?

LEVINE: How about shoes? Did you have shoes made, or did you buy shoes?

WALLS: No, we bought, bought the shoes. Uh, there was, coming to New York from a physical point of view, it, uh, didn't make a big impression on me.

LEVINE: Do you want to pause here so you can look at . . .

WALLS: Just for a moment.

LEVINE: Okay. (break in tape) Okay. We're resuming now. Uh . . .

WALLS: Okay. I'm not being very chronological, but let me revert back to the little statement about the religious strife. Uh, I remember I was only about four years old, and the Black and Tan, that was about 1921, and I was born 1917. And I distinctly remember in school writing 1-9-2-1. I can remember

that, at four years old. But we lived on 164 Nelson Street, and our family was split up because the Black and Tans were creating an awful lot of trouble for the Catholics and around Belfast. As a matter of fact, all over Ireland. The Black and Tans were, uh, English criminals, mostly people let out of jail come over and harass the Irish Catholics. And there was curfew, and my mother was pregnant at the time. I didn't know she was pregnant, but, uh, although I should have, because you were taught that your mother's going to have a baby, you know what I mean? And you had to acclimate yourself to whatever situation arrive from Mommy having a baby, right? And on one, I'm deviating again, one particular time, I think it might have been when Claire was going to be born, my father got my older brother and I, Willy, and he said, "I want this room thoroughly, thoroughly cleaned." You know? He says, "Because your mother's going to have the baby." You know? Boy, I remember we had to scrub and scrub and scrub and scrub, you know, to make sure, scrub, it was wooden floors, you know, you got to scrub the floors and everything, make sure everything would be shipshape

so my mother's going to have the baby. But reverting back to 164 Nelson Street, the curfew was on, I think it was, you weren't allowed out in the streets after nine o'clock, and I wanted to go down about four blocks, four long blocks, to see my brother Willie, right? Because we had been in school that particular today, and he had taken my pencil, right? So my poor mother, she's probably sick or something, I said, "I'm going up to see brother Willie," and she allowed me, but I went, and I was picked up by the police. And, of course, a lot of haranguing, and so forth and so on. But I remember going, and I knocked on the door of my aunt's, and this fellow who lived at my aunt's house came to the door, and his name was Willie Portis[ph], and I said, "Big Willie," I said, "I want to see my brother Willie." He says, "What do you want to see him for, Joe?" I says, "He has my pencil, and I want my pencil because I have to do my homework." Right? So, lo and behold, they came with a pencil about yay big, right? And I made my way back, and I was picked up again by the police, right, because they brought me home, and they reprimanded my mother, and so forth and so on.

Yeah. But, uh, eventually she was put out of that house and it was given to a Protestant family. Then later on when we lived in 94 Nelson Street, I was in this country at the time, and they came and, one lady who was a good friend of my mother's, she's told her, she says, "Mrs. Walls," she says, "you're going to be burned out tonight." So that was meaning get your sons away, because they might kill your sons, you know? So my mother made sure my brothers all were put into different homes with relatives and, sure enough, that night the house was burned down. Ah, it's just one of many instances.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

LEVINE: Boy, pretty dramatic, huh? Was there a feeling among the Northern Irish Catholics against the English?

WALLS: Yes.

LEVINE: In general.

WALLS: In general.

LEVINE: Not just the Black and Tans, but . . .

WALLS: Right.

LEVINE: Just was the whole . . .

WALLS: Yeah. I, uh, I'm not qualified to really speak on Irish history. But the salient facts are, you know, she's been dominated for eight hundred-odd years by the English, right? Then a series of revolutions throughout history. Then in, I guess it was in 1916, well, in 1916 they had the uprising, then they made a settlement with England, and out of the thirty-two counties, twenty-six were declared free. But the six northern counties, known as Ulster, right, they were still under British influence. And, reasonably so, until the very, up until today. And the reason of the fact of the strife was because during one of the periods, I guess, I think it was in the, around 1700's, the English brought over a lot of Protestants from Scotland, Presbyterians, and a lot of English from the lowlands and stuff, and they settled in Northern Ireland, and took the Irish lands away, and put all these people in. And they

were known, that was known as the Plantation, the time of the Plantation. And, uh, the Irish always felt that they were deprived of their homes, and because the Protestants were there so long they feel its their homes, you know? So it's a big, it's a big controversy still going on today, right?

America's trying to help. You know, Senator Mitchell is over there, he's trying to head up a committee. Yeah. The American government is trying to help.

LEVINE: Do you have any comments on, on today's situation, or, uh, what you think might happen, or any kind of comment?

WALLS: Well, the only comment I might make is that in the last, almost the last two years, since they started this peace movement, and I've been over there during that particular time, and it's been great. Uh, there's still a lot of apprehension, and a lot of, uh, they had a lot of, oh, unrest, still, but there is improvement. There is definite improvement. And with these, uh, the American government setting up some industries over there, they make sure that there is equality and the

employment, and it's still not perfect. But there are good attempts made. And it's a long way off, it's a long way off. But the fact is, they're talking, you know, until this recent outburst, you know? But for two years it was good, and both Protestants and Catholics liked it. It's still a long way off, but there is, there is hope.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, getting back to your story, so, when you left, did you leave, where did you leave from? What port?

WALLS: Belfast.

LEVINE: Belfast. And the ship?

WALLS: Albertic, S.S. Albertic. I think it was the White Star Line. I'm pretty sure it was the White Star Line.

LEVINE: And did you, uh, do you have, uh, any incidents that happened during the passage?

WALLS: Well, it was a long voyage. The voyage was very, very inclement, you know, in January we were going across the North Atlantic. And we didn't hit any icebergs, such as The Titanic did, but you could

see the icebergs.

LEVINE: You know, before we leave to come to this country, you mentioned something about The Titanic. Did you have any contact with either people who worked on it, or . . .

WALLS: Yes, I'll tell you a story about it. The story is my mother, my grandmother lived on Parlet[ph] Street, and that was just a hop, skip and a jump from where The Titanic was being built, right? So my mother and her sisters, when they were little kids, they used to go on, get in what they call a punt, it's like a little rowboat, right, and they would row over to the shipyard right where the Titanic was, and they would write their names on the steel plates that were being used in the building of the ship, right? And I think it was, it was 1910, right? Then my, when the ship was built, my father got a job on the ship, right? And, uh, they sailed out of Belfast, and they went to Southampton. She was picking up more passengers in Southampton. And my father and a few of his cronies, they were up the street to have a few, and they had a few, and they missed the ship. (he

laughs)

LEVINE: Wow. Um, okay. So, when you were on The
Albertic . . .

WALLS: The Albertic.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh . . .

WALLS: Oh, yeah. The, uh, nothing quite uncommon. There
was a lot of food, you know. And, uh, but I
remember one time one of the, uh, stewards, you
know, he brought me out a plate of mishmash, right?
And, uh, I resented it, you know, because I knew
that it wasn't on the menu, right? I should be
getting the same food as the rest of them were
getting, and I questioned him on it, you know?
And, uh, I didn't want to make waves, but I knew,
young as I was, I know I'm not going to be
mistreated, right? So I just refused to eat it. I
told him I want the same food as everybody else is
getting, you know? And, uh, eventually I got it.
Then, of course, they thought maybe, ah, it's a
little Irish kid, he don't know nothing, you know?
But I was well-versed in my table manners, because
my, my mother, she came from a good family, and she

knew what table manners were. And, yeah, I think, it sounds very, very egotistical, but we were a very, very mannerly family, and we respected people, and, uh, we expected to be treated likewise, you know? So there were really no problems on the ship. There was about eight of us in the one little cabin, you know? That was all right, you know. You're young, what's the difference. And, other than getting seasick, which I still do today, and I've been on the water all my life. I still get a little bit seasick. But I remember we landed in, uh, Halifax. My God, I never felt so cold! Oh, my God, is this what America's going to be like? I was never that cold in Ireland, you know.

LEVINE: Did you, you mentioned on this questionnaire that during the trip you would go on deck at night, and you would be alone there.

WALLS: Yeah. I remember one instance relative to that. One particular night I was so, really so blue. But there was five or six other guys in the cabin, so I couldn't cry with them. But I remember hugging the pillow and making believe it was my mother. (he

laughs) Or I'd go up on deck and be alone, just thinking, "Am I doing the right thing?" And hoping and praying it was the right thing, and then missing my family, you know? So I'd have my cry up there, you know? I recall one very, very heartbreaking, but it was good. One time I was walking along West Street, New York, that's where the docks are. That's like 12th Avenue, it's West Street, and all the ships were lined up. Now you don't see ships there any more, but there were ships from all parts of the world there, you know?

And I knew where, which docks the ships were going to, to England and Ireland, you know? I'd go down and say maybe I should, maybe I should stow away on that ship, you know? And I was thinking and thinking, and I said to myself, "But I didn't come here to think about stowing away. And if I want to make good here, then I have to obliterate all my memories of my home, because I can't cope with both." You know. And it sounds a little dramatic, but it is the absolute truth. I remember literally saying to myself, "I must pull down the curtain." And I pulled down the curtain, and I says, "No more. No more memories." I was about thirteen

then, right? But God was good, because I was able to, after, uh, I had become rather established, I was able to bring all those memories back into my mind again.

LEVINE: How?

WALLS: Just raise the curtain.

LEVINE: So this was later, like in your twenties?

WALLS: Yeah, yeah. People are amazed. I have, uh, I have a very keen memory for things of the past. Do you think so?

LEVINE: I think so. (she laughs) Okay. Well, how about memories of coming into the New York Harbor that first, that first time? Do you remember that?

WALLS: Yes, I remember it very vividly. And I say this, and I don't mean to speak disparagingly, but I want to speak realistically and practically. Everybody ran up to see the Statue of Liberty, right? A great, big deal. I was planning to see the Statue of Liberty. But it didn't make a great, big impression on me. I really didn't know the history of the Statue of Liberty. Uh, I didn't know how

you could associate the American Revolution with the French Revolution, right? And, hence, the, uh, the Statue of Liberty, because the significance was because the two, the French Revolution and the American Revolution were in similar times, reasonably similar times. Yeah. And when I, well, the first thing was Ellis Island, landing at Ellis Island particularly. Yeah. I didn't get into the city, you know? It was on Ellis Island. Uh, and I guess if we try to speak a little bit chronologically, Ellis Island was a big mishmash, you know? But, still, when I look back, they were well-organized, you know? Some of the pictures you see in the movies and milling about, what, they were reasonably well-organized. And, of course . . .

LEVINE: Were there lots of people when you happened to be there?

WALLS: Oh, yes, yes. And that's why I say they were well-organized, because I didn't have a lot of waiting to do. I think I was put in some kind of a little ante room or something like that along with other people, you know? And, uh, then you were

questioned, just questions in general before you, I, at least, later on, had to go for sort of a private interview with these three commissioners, you know? But, uh, you had to go through your medial exam. I remember a few people being put to the side. I learned later on they were probably turned down, you know? And they had some physical defect or something. But, fortunately, I was, had no problem physically. But then I had to go before these three, I don't know what you would call them, commissioners, or what they were, but I can remember them very distinctly, they were on sort of a dais, you know? And I'm looking at them, you know, a little guy, right? And they asked me my name, and where I came from, and how old I was, a lot of elementary questions, you know? And then, finally, why did you come to America, you know? And I said, "I came to America because I want to make good, I want to help my family." And then one of the men, he said, uh, "James," he says, "have you ever told a lie?" I said, "Of course I've told a lie." And he said, uh, "Why?" I says, "Because at the particular time the circumstances required me to tell a lie." I said, "It was not a lie to

hurt anyone. It was a lie of convenience." He said, "What do you mean by a lie of convenience?" I says, "Well," I says, "you are familiar with the religious situation in the North of Ireland." I says, "A fellow come, he used to be in amongst a whole lot of Protestant kids." I said, "Sometimes you couldn't be the hero and say, 'Yes, I'm a Catholic,' you know? You said something else, and you walked away, you know?" So, uh, he says, the other fellow said, "You know," he said, "you might be, you might raise yourself to be something good in America." He says, "But you'll never be President." (he laughs)

LEVINE: How about anything else about Ellis Island? Did somebody meet you? Did you have the required money to leave, or what, how . . .

WALLS: No, I stayed overnight.

LEVINE: You stayed overnight. And what was that like?

WALLS: No, it was all right. We just slept in the big dormitory. No big deal. We got some, they gave you a cup of coffee and some bread and stuff in the morning. It was good. No problem. Yeah. It was,

I was anxious, then, to get over to the city. And the first thing that struck my mind was, this was, this really sounds theatrical. I must have picked it up as a kid, somebody, but I said, "They say forest of concrete." All the big buildings. It's a forest, because I knew what concrete was, you know? "It's a forest of concrete." You know? And if I had any brains, I would have said, "It's a forest of steel and concrete." But, uh, I remember going up, riding up in the, uh, trolley car, up to, uh, 688 Washington Street, and that's where my cousin lived with his mother and father. And they had a nice little apartment, you know? The toilet was out in the hallway, right? And, uh, you shared that, you shared that toilet with another family. There was a family overhead, and there was a family down below. It was just three stories. It was a nice building.

LEVINE: Did, did, uh, how did you come to change your, uh, clothes, for American-type clothes?

WALLS: Oh. Well, needless to say the kids in school were kidding me, right? And I don't blame them, such an oddball going to school with shorts instead of

knickerbocker pants, right? So I told my cousin,
and, uh, he bought me, he bought me clothes.

LEVINE: Uh, were there many other kids who had recently
immigrated in your school, in your class?

WALLS: None, none.

LEVINE: Do you remember any teachers in particular?

WALLS: Pardon?

LEVINE: Do you remember any of your teachers?

WALLS: I remember them all. (Dr. Levine laughs) The,
uh, the principal, that was the headmaster. (he
laughs) Mr., uh, Rafferty, Daniel Rafferty, and
he was a rather rotund sort of a man, you know.
And, uh, he taught us, he gave us our singing
lessons. I can remember him, he could sing, but we
couldn't, you know? And he said, "We run the
scale. We run the scale." And he had this big
stick, I remember. "Do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-do."
(he laughs) And, uh, then he'd sing his, uh, oh,
he'd teach us great songs. The song, Sea Shanty.
I forget, it was, (he sings) "Away on the way,
fare you well, my pretty young girl, for long away

to the Rio Grande. And away and away." (he laughs) And it was great. We loved it. I remember another song. Oh, yeah. He'd sing, he says, "Now we'll sing an Irish song. (he sings)

Sure if I had the wings of a swallow, I would fly far over the sea. Then a rocky old road I would follow, to a spot that is Heaven to me. And when the sun goes to rest, I lay down in the west, then I'll build such a nest in the place I love best, oh, my land of dreams, you are with me, it seems, and I cannot for fame or renown, like the black sheep of old, I'll return to the fold, little town in the old county down." "Walls, you're off key."

"Yes, sir. Yes, Mr. Rafferty." (they laugh) Then we had his penmanship classes. He would go to the big, he had a big closet over in the corner of the room, you know? There was like three, three classes in the one room, you know? And, uh, he'd come around, and he'd see your penmanship, and he'd just shake his head, you know? And he'd go over to the room, and he'd bring out a book. "This is what I want." It was all that, Spensarian[ph] script? Is that the right word, Spensarian[ph]? Because he'd be showing me my father's handwriting. My

father, he would, like copperplate, you know, oh, God, his hand, what a writer, it was beautiful. And, of course, Mr. Rafferty had taught my father, right?

LEVINE: Really?

WALLS: Yeah. Yeah, he taught my father, and then he taught us. And my father's penmanship was always on exhibit, and that's what we were supposed to follow, right? But then, uh, we had, uh . . .

LEVINE: You mean Mr. Rafferty was literally in Ireland teaching?

WALLS: Yeah.

LEVINE: And was the teacher of your father.

WALLS: Yeah.

MRS. WALLS: He's talking about his teachers in Ireland.

LEVINE: Oh, you're talking about teachers in Ireland.

WALLS: Yeah.

LEVINE: I thought we were . . .

WALLS: No.

LEVINE: Okay. Yeah, okay.

WALLS: Then, uh, we had Mr., uh, Mr. Deegan, who was a good friend of my father's. I guess they were school buddies, you know? Then we had Mr. Donnelly. I remember Mr. Donnelly. He used to, I was a bit of a cut up in school, but it didn't harm nobody. I took advantage of, I knew, I knew I could do my work, you know, and I played on it, all right? But Mr. Donnelly, he says, "Joe," he says. He give me some copper pennies, you know? The terminology for loose change then was coppers, a few coppers, you know? And he'd send me up to his, to his home, and he was supposed to take a trolley car up the private walk, and I would save the money, right? And I was to do a message for his wife, you know? And he trusted you, you know? Oh, they were nice. They were good men, right? And by the same token, the teachers over here were great. I had the Christian brothers. They were great. Again, I seemed, I'm being egotistical, I think.

LEVINE: No, you're not. No. You're really interesting.
It's your story, after all.

WALLS: Yeah. It was in St. Veronica's School down in the west side, Greenwich Village. I was very, very self-conscious, because, I remember the first instance when a fellow said to me, the second day of school, I guess, he said, "What time is it?" I says, "Can't you see by the clock it's half nine?" Bingo. He said, "It's half nine? What the hell's he talking about?" You know? Well, from that day on the Irish brogue, and he was making fun of me, and everything else. And I, I resented it, but I said I have to live with it. You can't fight the whole class, all right? So he used to have spelling bees. You used to have to get up out of your seat and stand up all around the room, and then you'd have a long series of spelling, right? So I never got up. I wouldn't get up and stand for the spelling bee. And the brother was extremely tolerant, extremely tolerant. His name was Brother Allen. So one day he said, "How about . . ."
Several weeks later he says, "Stay after school. I want to see you." So then he, after school he

said, "Why don't you get up?" He says, "I don't want to punish you," he says, "but," he says, "every boy, every boy gets up." He says, "You have to get up, too." He says, "Why don't you get up?"

I says, "Well, I'm self-conscious because of the fact that I do have an Irish brogue." I said, "They're going to make fun of me." He says, "That's neither here nor there." He says, "Can you spell?" I says, "Well, I guess I might be the best speller in the class." He says, "If you don't get up there tomorrow morning," he says, "your backside's going to be warm." All right? The, shortly thereafter I represented the school in the All Parochial New York Spelling Contest. We were fortunate. We won.

LEVINE: (she laughs) So you didn't care about the brogue any more?

WALLS: No. He, uh, I'll tell you a story about the brogue. They were tearing down, New York Central was building a railroad along the West Side, an elevated railroad, and they had to tear down so many buildings, and our school was going to be torn down. But they would build a new school adjacent

to the one where we, which we were in at that particular time. So when the school is built, I guess this had been going on prior to school's already built, we just moved right into it. But Cardinal Hayes, who was the reigning Archbishop of New York at that particular time, he was asked to come down and bless the school. So we had a contest in his classes to see who would give the welcoming address, and I didn't present myself during the contest. And finally when it was down to about three or four then, again, Brother Allen said, uh, "Why don't you try?" I says, "I'm not interested." You know, he said, "I want you to try." Well, lo and behold, I was selected to give the welcoming address, and it was, uh, it was really great. It was, yeah. They had outdoor microphones, because all the people couldn't get into the building. They had outdoor microphones throughout the street, half a block. And, uh, thanks be to God, I was unabashed, and the speech came over very good, very good. And everybody was pleased and proud, you know. The little Irish guy, he made out good, on the basis of that presentation, yeah. The school, at that particular

time, they hadn't elected that year to put anybody in the elocution contest, the All Parochial Elocution Contest in New York city, right? So Brother, and the elocution teacher, talked to me, and they said, "There's only two weeks. There's not much time to commit to memory a long speech and prepare you for the proper presentation of it, you know?" He says, "Would you like to try it?" I says, "If you want me to do it, I'll do it." Right? So I committed it to memory very rapidly, and then the elocution teacher, he was very good, you know? And, and in two weeks' time, we entered the contest. I think one of the biggest thrills of my life was after we won the contest the kids, the American kids carried me on their shoulders. So they were proud of me, and I was pleased with them.

It was a great, it was a great event, it was a great event. You know, it's funny. I remember that elocution teacher. "One of the nicest things," he says, "is a gesture. So many people don't know how to give a, don't know how to put in a decent gesture, you know?" And I watched this baseball player, a guy that's, uh, the money, loads of money, you know, and he's talking, and he's

talking, and I count fourteen stupid-ass gestures with that guy, Jim Palmer is his name. And he's a nice man, very beautiful, good-looking man, and presents himself lovely, and speaks well, but the hands going. And I noticed that they finally came up to him, they cut him out now, all right? Probably, the, I remember when the teacher comes, he says, "A gesture's like," he says, "when Jesus Christ spoke to the throngs," he says, "when he spoke, his hands were like this." And little things like that stay in your mind. That's sixty-odd years now, right? But, and I'm so, I'm so sensitive about gestures. (he laughs)

LEVINE: How come you got rid of your brogue?

WALLS: Good question. I remember after that speech, Brother Allen, he and I were talking, and he said, "You do well in school," he says, "but you like to, you fool around too much, you know?" I like to play handball, and every time I get a chance I was playing handball, right? As a matter of fact, another kid and I, we used to play with the brothers, and we'd tell them, "You can beat us in school, but we beat you in handball." But they

were good brothers, you know? Yeah. But Brother Allen said to me, he said, "Joe," he said, "it's very, very conceivable," he said, "because you're young, because of your constant association with American boys." He says, "You will probably lose your brogue." But, he says, "Don't ever deliberately try to lose it." And I notice a lot of people that come to (?), they try so hard to use their brogue, you know? And it's silly, you know? And they talk, I get sick of them, you know? You don't have to be ashamed of your brogue, you know? But do try to speak properly, you know?

LEVINE: Okay, well, we're going to pause here for a moment, because I want to change the tape.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: This is the beginning of Tape Two now, and I'm speaking with Joe Walls, who came from Ireland in 1930 at twelve years of age. And we were just about to talk about when you first got to this country and you, you, first you want to your cousin's. And, did you see your uncle who provided

the money for you to get here? Was that the same uncle?

WALLS: That was my cousin.

LEVINE: Oh, right, it was your cousin. Oh, okay.

WALLS: Yeah, yeah. Uh, he lived with his mother and father, whom I called aunt and uncle. Right?

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

WALLS: Yeah. But he was, uh, my prime benefactor, right?

He was a very, very good man, right? Thanks be Almighty God, later on we were able to be of great assistance to him. He developed muscular dystrophy. I suppose, again I keep using the word chronological, but I guess you can piece it all together some way or another. While I was away in the war for almost four years, my cousin Johnny would come, maybe once a month, and stay with Madeline for a weekend, right? And it was at that time his, the deficiencies of the muscular dystrophy were beginning to manifest themselves. He was losing his grip, and he was walking with sort of a halt in his step. We, Madeline always

took him, right, and when his family would go away for the holidays or something, he would come and stay with us. And she remembers him very well, and, uh, he'd come, we lived up in Harworth[ph]. We had a nice, big home up in Harworth[ph], right?

And he the run of a home, you know? And him and Madeline got along famously. We always tell the story about one time, I wasn't there, but, uh, Madeline had to go out to the store for something, and Johnny was sitting in his chair, and apparently he got up to get something, and he fell down, and he couldn't get up, right? So Madeline come in, she's trying to raise him, she falls down, she can't get up. (he laughs) So Johnny and Madeline are in a wrestling match. (he laughs) Every time the story is told we go in stitches. If you knew my Madeline, she was one, she was out of this world completely. She was the most beautiful person you ever met in your life. And she was so intelligent, you know, and common sense, you know. And so succinct, you know? (he laughs) Tell you a story in three words that would cover a manuscript. But, "Madeline, how are you making out with Johnny?" (they laugh) But thanks be to

God, he was in a nursing home this particular time, and my brother and I, we went up, and it was a Saturday afternoon, we went up to see Johnny. And I could always give him a good shower, you know, and shave him, and I knew how he slept. And when I used to put him in bed and get him to sleep, he'd stay that way all night, you know? And he was very witty. Oh, he was so witty. He was witty, and he was kind. He was a thorough gentleman. But come around five o'clock, and he was up in Cold Spring, New York, right up, just north of the Bear Mountain Bridge, and after I'd give him a shower and shaved him and so forth, got him into bed, so I says, "Johnny, I think we'll head on home." We were only an hour from Bear Mountain when we lived up in Harworth[ph], it was about an hour's ride. So, "We'll come and see you tomorrow, twelve o'clock, John." Right? He said, "I won't be here, Joe." "What do you mean you won't be here? Your family aren't back yet?" "I won't be here, Joe." "Oh, you're a crazy guy." You know? He died the next morning. Boy, it's, I think he knew he was going to die, you know? And yet he was, what we thought was reasonably good considering the, his severe

illness that he was in, you know? But that was Johnny Ward, a great guy.

LEVINE: Speaking of glitch, do you have any, uh, any comments on the Irish sort of, uh, what do I want to say, Leprechaun, spiritual, other kinds of mystical sides?

WALLS: Well, I don't know if this is relevant, but when we lived in Harworth[ph], we believed that we had spirits in the home up there in Harworth[ph]. And we lived there thirty years and we never had a lock on the door. And Madeline and I and the kids went to Ireland a few times, we never locked the door, never had a problem. But you could hear footsteps all over that house at nighttime. And I distinctly, very distinctly recall a knock on the door this particular night, and I went down, there was nobody there. There was no pranksters, because it was a little, quiet, neighborhood, there were no pranks. But, uh, we always heard noises. But it never bothered us. And you couldn't say it was the house was settling in, because it was an old house, well settled. Yeah. Finally one time Madeline says, "I'm going to have Father Dowd[ph] bless the

home, Joe, all right?" "Go ahead." So he came down, and he blessed the whole house. He even made Madeline open the closets. He sprinkled the closets with holy water and things. Uh, leprechauns, never had much thought about leprechauns. We used to, in those days we used to, the name fairies. If they existed, they existed. If they didn't exist, they didn't exist. We talked about them in a commonplace manner, you know? We did believe, as kids in Ireland, and this was only, I guess, fantasy, so to speak, but the ships would be, blowing their horns on the winter's nights, we kids would all be standing around somewhere, you know, and maybe a fire in the street roasting potatoes, you know? And somebody said, "There's the Llewelyn[ph]." You know? Because it would give an eerie, eerie blast, and it was long, you know, and penetrating. And somebody says, "Llewelyn[ph]." She was the wife of some captain, and she was murdered on that ship. So we thought that was Llewelyn[ph]. Then the other one was, there was a Galliver Thompson[ph]. He rode a big white horse up and down the streets, you know? And there was no such thing, but we . . . (comment

off mike)

LEVINE: (?)

WALLS: That's Galliver Thompson[ph], right? (they laugh) The, uh, in those days, a lot of the Catholic girls worked in the mills, the linen mills, and in the tobacco factories, and millions of girls go to work in their bare feet, you know? In a clean dress and their bare feet. You know, shoes were too precious to be wearing. You walk up and down there, they'd maybe walk a mile-and-a-half to go to their work, you know? But, uh, there was, my aunt in this country told me a story. I didn't have any part of, but just relating what she told me. A lot of the mill girls, they used to wear doffers[ph]. I think that's related to the girl working in the mills. And they were all coming home from their work this particular day, and there was this very high class gentleman who was walking ahead of them with the large bora[ph] hat, you know, top hat, frock coat. And as impeccably as he was dressed, his handkerchief was hanging out from his back pocket. So the girls are snickering and snickering, and one girl says, "Mister, how much is

your linen per yard?" He turned around and he said, "Ask me arse, that's where the sale's going on."

LEVINE: (she laughs) Well, how about this country now? You went to school, and then you, when you finished school, you, well, you were bringing your brothers and sisters over, or no?

WALLS: Uh, later on. After I finished school, I worked in a grocery store for a while. I worked sixty hours a week for five dollars.

LEVINE: This was the depression.

WALLS: Yeah. Then that job closed up, and I got a job working in a rubber factory, rubberizing fabric that would be, eventually be used for shower curtains and things like that. I used to run a big machine, you know? Yeah. Well, I was making about eight dollars a week then. And it was pretty good. Then that job folded, and I had a very nice furnished room out in Astoria, Long Island. And it was a man and a woman, and they only charged me three dollars a week for the room, and it was a lovely room. But I was mannerly and respectful and

respectable, you know? So I got along good with them. But when the shops folded up and my money ran out, I told them I had to leave. So I was going to sleep in a truck. A friend of mine had a truck, and he kept it in a closed garage, so I was going to reside in my truck. They said, "Stay with us, Joe." I said, "I can't." "Well, you can pay us later on." You know? I said, "I can't run up a bill. If I knew that I was going to get work later on, I'd say yes." But I says, "I can't, I can't put my responsibility on you, you know?" So they were very good people, but I wouldn't stay with them. I didn't want to take advantage of them. I says, "You can rent the room out to somebody else. You need the money." You know? So I went in the truck, slept in that truck. But then I've always made a few dimes and a few nickels washing people's cars and things like that. And I was always going to night school. I loved school. I was always taking classes and courses, right? Finally I got a job on the docks. It was very, very hard work. A friend of mine, I was a strong kid, and, uh, yeah, I liked a little bit of competition there, and I liked it. And I kind of sized up the situation,

and I said, "I'll make this my livelihood, and I'll make good."

LEVINE: What was it about it do you think that clicked in for you to . . .

WALLS: Well, number one, it was ships, and we come from a seafaring family, right? Number two, there was such a challenge, right? The full appreciation of the challenge didn't come until later life when I was manager. Uh, but you had to get a ship into port, and you had X number of hours to unload the cargo, and X number of hours to load that cargo. And needless to say, the dominant factor there was the longer your ship is laying in port, the longer you're paying rent so, rent is not the word, you know, but you're paying money for dockee's fees, right? And that's big money. And, uh, the ship is not making money when she's sitting at the dock. She's making money when she's conveying cargo from one place to another. So, uh, realizing all this, and I was going to take a lot of courses, I wrote to the Jesuits over in St. Francis Xavier School on West 16th Street. And we studied labor laws, and union organizations, and I remember particularly we

used to study the Inciticals[ph] a lot, and Pope Pious X, and Pope Leo XIII, and they were the fore, I think, in my estimation, the forerunners of the, uh, betterment of the social necessities for the working man, you know? They were fantastic, Inciticals[ph]. Raro Navarum[ph], I think, is probably the most important one, and that was by Pope Pious X and, uh, then Leo XIII. And they were, there were some cyclical[ph] on labor where, uh, I think about, formed around 1910 or something. But, uh, it was all tied in and, uh, later . . .

LEVINE: Your mother, too, was she, right? I mean, that would have been her cup of tea.

WALLS: Oh, yeah, yeah. Labor. I'll tell you, they were, one of my philosophers sounds, sounds very, uh, not immature, but very simple, but yet it meant a lot. She lived in America for five years. She loved America. And, uh, she said, "You know, Joe, you can go down to 14th Street, and you can buy a shirt for two dollars. Now, admittedly, you wouldn't get much wear out of that shirt. But if you were going to present yourself for a job, you could always have a clean shirt, because you could always make

two dollars, and you could go and present yourself with a nice clean shirt and a fifty cent tie." Right? And she says, "Another good feature of that," she says, "even if you only got three or four wearings out of that shirt," she said, "it did put somebody to work. The manufacturing of the shirt employed somebody." Right? "The shirts helps you present yourself for a job." And then she says, "When it was disposed, it went towards paper, making paper, or something else." Right? So she said, it's a great philosophy, you know? There was nothing wrong with the fact that it was of inferior quality. It served its purpose. It served a good purpose, you know? And it was, it was affordable to those who were not in the best of circumstances, right? That was, that's just a little highlight on my mother, you know?

LEVINE: So we were talking about, after, so it was after you got your, the job on the docks, that you started then bringing the family over?

WALLS: The family over here.

LEVINE: And when did you meet your wife?

WALLS: (he sighs) I'm boring you.

LEVINE: No, you're not. No, no.

WALLS: I worked with her brother Tommy.

LEVINE: On the dock.

WALLS: And Tommy was a great guy. We were going through some hard times. There wasn't much work. And this day we got a job, and it was for four hours. Well, that meant we could, we were getting eighty cents an hour then, which was pretty good. So, we should come out with three, four, three-and-a-half dollars at least, you know? So Tommy said to me, he said, you didn't get paid till the following Friday. He says, uh, "Where you going for lunch, Joe?" "There's no lunch today, Tommy." "What do you mean?" "I'm broke." All right? That was all right. You could skip a meal now and then. He says, "Why don't you come up the house? Mom made soup." So they lived in 197 Tenth Avenue, right, which was only two blocks from the piers, right? "Okay, Tom." So I go up and I met Minnie then. That was Madeline's mom, right? And, um, a great lady, a great lady. Right? And her husband died

when Madeline was five, so Madeline had no daddy from when she was five years old. There was a little girl sitting there, right? She was fourteen. I was eighteen. No way, right? But I was fascinated with her, right? And I'd see her passing a few times. I had a bowl of soup, and I got familiar with the family. And Madeline was a great athlete, you know, so after, summer nights, throwing a ball, she'd catch a ball. She could hit a ball like a baseball player, right? She could swim. Right? And she was a nice girl. So when she was fifteen I started to take her out. And, uh, the love match set in. One time Willa[ph] said, "Joe," she said, "I think Madeline has to go out and see more boys." Right? So I said, "I guess you're right." So we parted for about a year. (he laughs) But that was all. (he laughs) And when she come back, she wouldn't leave me. I says, "As soon as you're old enough, we're getting married." So when she was nineteen, we got married. But, uh, she had a good mother, a good family.

LEVINE: Now, did you keep particular contact with other

Irish people when you were here?

WALLS: No, and sometimes I think I missed the boat. Because you have an Irish Mafia in this country just the same as you have an Italian Mafia. You have a real Irish. I don't mean to use the word Mafia derogatorily, you know? But the, I think the Irish are the greatest public relations system in the whole world. God, they're smart people. They, and they have their cliques. And I should have associated myself, but I was too engrossed with the docks, engrossed with going to, trying to take courses in school. Yeah, my affiliation was all with American boys, meaning that it was my fault that I didn't continue to develop an association with Irish, Irish people, you know?

LEVINE: When you say public relations, the best public relations system in the world, what do you mean by that?

WALLS: Uh, well, the Irish are renowned for their political accomplishments. They are one of the smallest countries in the world. Not the smallest, but one of the smallest. They only have a

population of approximately four million people. Yet they are prominent in almost every major country in the whole world. And you even take, uh, Chile. The first president of the country of Chile was O'Higgins. Yeah. I wish I was qualified to tell you the story of the Irish who were banished from their homes, sent in servitude to the colonies in Australia and New Zealand. And one became governor of New York, the other became a senator. Seven of the, there's a great story about those seven men. I think that typifies some of the great accomplishments of the Irish in general, right? Not to say that all the Irish were perfect. Certainly the Irish had their drunkards, right? The same as any other nation, right? Yeah. But they certainly, they left indelible positive remarks anywhere they went, on whatever. The, uh, the Irish were the, uh, were the dominant factors in the building of the American railroads. The Irish were the dominant factors in the building of canals. The Irish were famous in the New York Police Department. They were famous in the New York Fire Department. The Emerald Societies of the fire departments and the police departments and

some of the maritime departments throughout the United States, Emerald Societies, are renowned, right? They're charitable, and, uh, they are very, very, uh, loyal to all their members in helping them, each other, you know? Yeah. I have to use the word, I'm not truly qualified enough to elaborate on it.

LEVINE: Right. But you have the sense that maybe you should have made that connection and kept that connection a little bit.

WALLS: Right. Not that (?) any. I thank God for what we did accomplish, right? Yeah. And I guess the proudest thing in my whole life, not only, naturally, my beloved Madeline, right, but the three great kids that she brought into this world, three million dollar blessings, right?

LEVINE: And how do you think about this, this, coming here as an immigrant? How do you feel about immigrating here, living out your life here and going back to business, but essentially changing the direction, let's say, or at least the place of your living?

WALLS: That's a very, very good question. Uh, someone

recently asked me something in regard to that. I think it was a lady, and she said, uh, "Do you think if you had stayed in Ireland you would have made out as well as you made out here?" I says, again, I belabored the word egotistical. I don't mean to be egotistical. I'm trying to be truthful.

(voices off mike) The, uh, yes, I would have made out well in Ireland. I wouldn't say I was entrepreneurial, but I was aggressive, and I knew that I had common sense, I knew that, uh, I had, uh, a reasonable education. I knew that if I didn't have it then I would attain some academic standings. Yeah. And I knew that, uh, I had good examples before me, and despite the fact that there would have been many adverse situations due to the, uh, religious and political strife in Ireland, because of the fact that I was somewhat adaptable, I could apply myself to cattle, I could apply myself to seamanship. I could apply myself to common ordinary labor, right? And because of the fact that I liked studied, I know it, I would have done all right. But that, I don't, I think that doesn't answer the question. The question was we needed help, immediately, so to speak. All right,

it didn't come immediately, because it had to be a period of time from school to employment. But I cut my school, my education short here so that I could go to work, right? And I had the opportunity to get work, and thus help my family. So I have no regrets. And I guess the, the saving factor, the salient factor, the saving factor is I got Madeline and I got my three children. I don't know what I would have got in Ireland.

LEVINE: (she laughs) That's true.

WALLS: So, so I came out ahead in every way, right? If I don't have Madeline now, I have the great memories of her, right? And, uh, I have (?). (he laughs)

LEVINE: Is there anything more you'd like to say about, uh, your mother coming to this country?

WALLS: Oh, that was . . .

LEVINE: What that was like.

WALLS: The, uh, I, I don't like to, uh, bring the religious atmosphere into it, but my mother was a devout sort of a lady, right? As I say, she didn't

wear her religion on her sleeve, because she was, for all purposes, practical. She was, for all purposes, charitable and kind and understanding. Uh, not totally tolerant of the Protestant situation. But, uh, I think one of the most penetrating remarks I ever heard from her, there was a church on 31st Street in New York City, St. Francis of Assisi, right? And in the 1950's when my mother came here there was no shortage of priests. Today in the Catholic religion there is a shortage of priests. And my mother liked to go to Mass daily, and she would go from Washington Heights, take the subway and go down to 31st Street, and she'd come back and she'd say, "Joe, I heard five Masses today." Because different priests would be at different altars saying their Mass, right? She says, "Can you imagine, Joe, five Masses at one time." That made such an impression on her. And someone at that particular time said to her, "Aren't you afraid of getting lost on the subways, Minnie, Mary?" "Sure, I have a tongue in me head," she says, "why would I get lost?" Huh? Yeah. I told you the story about her with the clothing, you know, with the shirts, the two dollar

shirts.

LEVINE: Oh, right.

WALLS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Right. How about your father? Did he ever come here?

WALLS: Yeah, he came here.

LEVINE: And what was his, uh, kind of take on New York?

WALLS: Uh, he never . . .

LEVINE: Because he'd been lots of places, because he'd been probably on a ship.

WALLS: Oh, yeah, he'd been all over the world, yeah. He never, he was never overly impressed, you know? It was a good country, you know? And, as a matter of fact, I put him to work for a while down on the docks as a security officer, you know? And, uh, but he wanted back down. He wanted to be back with his cronies, and go up to the pub and have a couple and chiat[ph], the word they use, they have a bit of crack, a bit of crack, you know? A pint and a bit of crack. You know? And it was totally

innocent, you know? And they were all great sports people in those days. They loved their sports, you know? And, I'll tell you a little story about, I had, my brother Paul, Paul was, I guess, I didn't see, I never knew Paul as a child, because I was over here, right? And I guess he was spoiled, Mother's last child, you know? But, oh, he was a kind, he was so kind and good, you know? A kind boy. But, uh, he had a memory like, my God. I had him work on the docks for a while, right, working with the carpenters down there, as sort of an apprentice, you know?

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: So you could not only bring him over, but you could give him a job. Quite an operation. (she laughs).

WALLS: The men would ask Paul to go for coffee, right? You know how the men send out for the coffee. There'd be five or six men there. And, uh, "What do you want?" "Coffee and a buttered roll." "Coffee and a piece of Danish." "Tea, no milk,

just sugar." "Just get me a container of milk." I'll have this, maybe six different orders, right, different currency, you know, a dollar, fifty cents, right? He wouldn't write anything down, and he'd come back with everything perfect. As a matter of fact, I met a guy here about a year ago down in one of the little union meetings we had, I went down there, down in New York, 17th Street. And this fellow would come over, he says, "Joe, do you remember me?" He said, "Of course I remember you." Right? He said, "What about your brother, Paul?" I said, "Oh, Paul died many years ago." He said, "Joe," he says, "that fellow didn't go to school. How did he ever develop such a memory." And I remember, I said I can answer the question, because I asked Paul the same question. I thought I had a good memory, you know, but Paul could buy and sell me, right? "Paul, how did you develop such a memory?" "Oh, no problem, Joe. Before I would be home, they were playing the horses, you know, and he'd have all these horses and big piece of paper." You know, and, uh, my father would say to Paul, "Paul, go around to the bookie shop." See, like OTB parlors. "And get some of the

results." Well, Paul would go around, write it, and write it. He'd read it three or four times, and he might come back with about ten different horses, whether they won or lost, or come in second, third, the price they paid. He'd come back and tell my father. He says, "I had it in my mind, Joe. I didn't want to write, because my handwriting was rotten." Oh, he was, he was a card. But, uh, my father went back. He only stayed here a few years, and then he went back. Then later on my mother, she didn't want to go back. But, uh, I had her over to St. Vincent's Hospital in New York, you know? And, uh, sometimes I'd stop in, she had a little apartment up in Washington Heights, and I'd stop in on my way from work to see her. And I remember distinctly one night I come to see her and she was laying diagonally across the bed, you know? And, "You're not well, Mother." She says, "I'm not well, Joe." You know? And she had, uh, she had always attended a lady doctor in Ireland, right? And she had some vaginal problems, you know? And when I got her to St. Vincent's, then, after I got her, and the aunt, you know, and I went to the doctor,

they told me she has cancer, you know? So, uh, I got the family together, and I just knew she would want to go home, you know, because she would want to be buried in Ireland. And she was, we didn't tell her. And, as a matter of fact, I didn't elaborate too much with the rest of the family, and I told them that it was something rather serious, and so forth. And we got her home, and my sister Kathleen was there. She was very good to my mother. Then my brother Jack called one night and he said the doctor said mother may live maybe two more months or so. So we all got together, Madeline and I and the three kids, and my brother Willie and his two kids, my sister Claire and his two kids, and we got a plane, and we went over to Ireland to be with Mother when she died, right? But I remember when, when we landed in Ireland, she was that rotten yellow color, you know? And, uh, she says, "Why are you all home, Joe?" And I says, "Just fell in, we were lucky." I said, "We all got our holidays at the same time, so we figured we'd come back and see how you are." And so forth and so on, you know? But I remember when she, uh, they had a lovely bedroom up, one flight up. And I was

sitting by her, and she said, "Joe, I'm too young to die." I didn't know what to say. I said, "We pray, Mother." You know? But, uh, great lady.

LEVINE: Do you have qualities that you consider strictly Irish about you? Do you have American qualities and Irish qualities, or how do you put the two together in your own, in your own way?

WALLS: Be a little more definitive on qualities.

LEVINE: Well, I mean, uh, are there certain attributes that you consider Irish that you have, and the same with American. And do you, do you consider yourself more one than the other, or how do you work out that balance of your two, your two countries?

WALLS: Uh, I think the little incident I related to earlier, December 7th, Pearl Harbor, December 8th, I enlisted. And it took an awful lot of thinking and concern knowing Madeline was going to have a baby, and knowing that I was going to be going far, far away, like seven thousand miles away from her. But I tried to be aware and appreciate the fact that America gave me an opportunity, yeah, to do good, and to be of some help to my family and to

other people. Yeah. I was willing to lay my life down for America, and for America's causes. Yeah.

Needless to say, you can never forget the land of your birth, right, but you must, I think your first loyalty must come to those who provided for you, or gave you the opportunity to attain, you know? So I think my first love has to be America. And naturally that is thoroughly enhanced because of the fact that my wife was thoroughly American, right, American through and through, and because my children are American, right? So I think the, uh, it's, uh, it's rather academic. The, uh, your love must be, must be American, right? This, sure you love the land of your birth, sure you try to help your former country in some small way if you can, or help the people from that country. Yes, no harm. But your first allegiance must be to the land that provided, gave you the opportunity.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, this is a good place to end, but is there anything else to think of that maybe we haven't covered that pertains? I have the feeling, you know, we could cover many tapes, but anything that comes to mind.

WALLS: I don't think this is totally pertinent, but it's just a little, it's anecdotal. The, uh, there was a lot of the enmity, a lot of belligerence, and a lot of conniving on the docks. And this man's name was Mickey Marrow[ph], and he was from Tipperary in Ireland. And he was the man that gave me my first opportunity on the docks. The first job he ever gave me was two hours' work, right? The second job was four hours' work. And I had to prove myself in those two periods, and I knew I could prove myself. But he gave me the opportunity. Later on in life I was in fairly high position on the docks. This man, he'd walk down the docks, and the work for him had become overly sophisticated. In his day it was just London, Liverpool, so to speak, you know? Today we're loading ships for eighteen ports of call, we're handling ten thousand tons in two or three days' time, and reloading ten thousand tons, and we're employing something like four or five hundred men in various positions on the docks and on the ships. And we're in contact with the ports of Philadelphia, Boston, Charleston, Savannah, New Orleans, Miami, Panama, and then throughout South America there was Columbia, Bonaventura[ph],

Cali[ph], Yaquiel[ph] Ecuador, and Calya[ph] in Peru, Oriquillendo[ph], Salare[ph], Tolaro[ph], Yaquiel[ph], San Antonio, Valporiso[ph], Antogesta[ph], and various ports, other, and Chile.

And subsequent ports throughout the Caribbean, Guardajina[ph], Barrenquina[ph], Kingston, Jamaica, Port au Prince, and St. Thomas. And, uh, when Mr. Morrow[ph] walked down the docks, he was all, it was all Greek to him, but still he was to be taken care of, right? Some fellows resented him because he was a tough boss, but I didn't mind him being a tough boss. I could do my work, you know?

But I never forgot the fact that he did give me, when he come down on the dock, I would stop whatever I was doing, and I would go and talk with him. And many times if his shoes was unlaced, I would take a carton from someplace, and make him put his foot on the carton, and I would tie his shoe. And people used to say, "What the hell are you doing that for that old so-and-so for?" Right?

And my stock answer-in-trade was, "He gave me a piece of bread when I was hungry." You can't forget those things. So, a little sense of loyalty, maybe I carried it a little bit too far,

but he, he deserved a little loyalty, I thought, and if I could manifest it, so be it, right? Yeah.

That was just a little incident on the waterfront, you know?

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, it sounds like, the way you talked about this country, you know, sort of giving you the bread when you were hungry. Okay. Well, I think this is a good place to stop, and I want to thank you so much for an incredibly rich interview.

Um, this is July 20, 1996. I'm here in Fort Lee, New Jersey, with Joe Walls, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off. (break in tape) Okay, we're going to actually add some more to this tape right here, because we've been talking since. Okay, um . . .

WALLS: I would like to refer to a little incident about my mother.

LEVINE: Okay.

WALLS: When my mother first came here, we were living, Madeline, Jimmy, Sheila, Brian and I, we were living in an apartment in Washington Heights. So Mother and my sister Claire came. They got the

children's bedroom, and the children slept out in the foyer of the apartment. Brian was in a cot, and with Madeline and I in the bedroom, right? And shortly thereafter my brother Willie came. He had gone back to Ireland from America to get his bride, and he had no apartment. So Willie and Maureen stayed with us. So Madeline and I gave them our bedroom, and Madeline and I slept on a pullout bed in the living room, and the children were in the foyer. Uh, Madeline worked hard because they were not Americanized, and, uh, there was sometimes a little difference, a little verbal difference, but you could see a little coolness sometimes, right? Shortly thereafter my brother and his wife got a little apartment, and then my mother and Claire got a little apartment. And Madeline was the essence of kindness to my mother, to everyone. But, still, my mother was a little bit haughty. Then we moved out to Hallworth[ph]. My mother would come and stay with us for a weekend, and she got to know Madeline. Because Madeline was very, very straight, and she didn't fondle(?) or fawn over anyone. And she would put a meal on the table, and give it to you with her heart, right? Years later

when my mother went back to Ireland and she told my sister Kathleen and some other people, and my sister Kathleen told me this story. My mother said to her, she said, "I have good daughters-in-law, but none so great as the Yankee, our Madeline." That, uh, that made me so happy. Even I had a letter from Kathleen recently, and she says, "Joe," she says, "you often gave me some money, but you didn't know Madeline did, too." (they laugh) Madeline would say, "Don't tell him. Get it off him, too." She, uh, as Sheila said, she took in everybody, everybody. And, uh, as a matter of fact, we have a cousin today, and he has a very good job working for Ford, and Madeline didn't get him into Ford company. She got him into a job that led him to Ford. She got him the job, you know? She heard of a vacancy someplace. She said, "Joe, get Terry on that. Get Terry." Right? And she took Terry up there, and, uh, got him interviewed, and he got the job, right? And today, from then on, he done it himself, you know? But so many people, she helped, you know? She never said no to nobody, took everybody in.

LEVINE: What was the, uh, kind of rule of the house as far as bringing people over, letting them stay?

WALLS: I don't, I'd just say it to her, and she say, Madeline, so-and-so needs help, you know? And perhaps we could bring . . . She says, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I know, Joe, I know." And she just accepted them, you know? And I never seen her fussin'. I don't mean to be critical, but I watch women in kitchens, and I never saw her, I never seen Madeline cook, but there was always a meal. I never seen her clean the house, but it was always clean. She done so, things so unassumedly, you know? But it was always right in the forefront, you know? Oh, I guess I talk too much about her, but I think one of the nicest little stories about her was when, uh, Jimmy came home from, uh, college this particular summer, there was six boys who had no place to go. All young college students. So we lived up in Harworth[ph] then. We had a beautiful semi-finished attic, you know? It was the length of this whole room, you know? Jim said, "Mom, these boys need help." Right? So he brought six boys home, and Madeline took them in, she put cots

up in the attic, right? And they were boys, and they were the epitome of good. They were absolutely great boys, right, great athletes. And they called her Madeline, and they called me Joe. And we had a great time, those boys. I'll never forget, one of them was a little black boy, and he came from the island of Dominica. Not the Dominican Republic, the island of Dominica. Right? And, uh, his name was Renny Sorrendo, and he spoke with a French pa'twa[ph]. Yeah? Is that the word? Pa'twa[ph]? Yeah. And he was the youngest of the group, right? And he was the smallest, but he was a strong kid. And it was during the Christmas holidays, and we had presents for each of the boys. But I had a particular present for Renny. There was an abandoned military camp in upper state New York, and I took Renny up there, and I taught him how to drive a car. And we came back, and he told the boys, "I got the greatest present from Mr. Walls. He teach me how to drive the car!" (Dr. Levine laughs) But, uh, Madeline took six boys in like that. She never turned anybody away from her door. And she used to go, too, up to the, uh, the Wolfnites(?) up in Blava[ph], do the

ironing for the nuns up there, you know? Once a week, you know? Her and a few other ladies. But they ironed, sewed, ironed, sewing, and cleaning for the kids, the little orphan kids, you know? Yeah. There was nothing too much for her.

LEVINE: Yeah. Before we end, maybe, Sheila, you could say how you remember the household when, uh . . .

SHEILA: People coming over.

LEVINE: People were coming over.

SHEILA: I know we'd always get a letter, and somebody wanted to come over, and didn't have work, or whatever. And it would be talked about, and then they would come. And, again, the part I'd remember most was, like, trying to get them work, and once the man got the work, and then they would go look for an apartment afterwards. So it would usually be something like six months that they'd be with us, and then it would spread from there. After they would get established, someone else would be coming over, and they might stay with us, or then they might stay with the other relatives. So eventually most of my father's brothers and sisters

came to us, and a lot of his cousins, first cousins and second cousins, all came to us, too. And they're all living and working in various parts of the United States now, mostly (?).

WALLS: Pertinent to that, one first cousin died just a couple of years ago. And, uh, one of his greatest accomplishments was when he was going down to Newark to become an American citizen, I had to go with him. He wouldn't go unless I went with him. He said, "You are responsible for all of our family being here." And that family made out very well.

LEVINE: Ah. Okay. Well, that's a beautiful place to end, and I think we'll really call it quits now. Thank you very, very much.