

EI-832

ANN BARBARA CONNACHAN NELSON

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LEVINE: Now, this is December 8th, 1996 and I have the pleasure of being in the Ellis Island Oral History Studio with Ann V. Nelson, who came from Scotland in 1923 when she was seven years of age. Today Mrs. Nelson is eighty-one years of age and she's visiting the museum with her son Scott and her daughter-in-law Nancy and her granddaughter Kimberly. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Would you start, Mrs. Nelson, by giving your birth date and where in Scotland you were born?

NELSON: I was born in Bathgate, Scotland on March 20th, 1915.

LEVINE: Now, did you—did your mother ever tell you any stories about your birth? Any particular incidents connected with it? No. What was your mother's name?

NELSON: My mother's name was Mary Cosgrove. Her maiden name, Cosgrove.

LEVINE: C-O-S—

NELSON: G-R-O-V-E.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and were both your mother and father born in Scotland?

NELSON: Both of them, yes.

LEVINE: And your father's name?

NELSON: Father, Patrick Connachan, C-O double N A-C-H-A-N.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and did you have sisters and brothers before you came to this country?

NELSON: I had one older sister, two younger sisters.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and what was your older sister's name?

NELSON: Her name was Catherine and then came me. Then came Elizabeth and then came Mary.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. And did you have grandparents who lived nearby who you had any connection with?

NELSON: No, I never knew my grandparents on either side.

LEVINE: How about aunts and uncles?

NELSON: Aunts and uncles? My mother was the oldest of seven sisters. So I had many aunts.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NELSON: And on my father's side, he had four sisters and two brothers.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and did they live in surrounding areas?

NELSON: On my mother's side, my father came to the United States in November of 1922, with two of my mother's sisters.

LEVINE: Oh.

NELSON: You see.

LEVINE: Now, why did he come at that time?

NELSON: To get a job and establish a home for us. So they came those few months before we did.

LEVINE: And what did your father find to do for a job?

NELSON: He—he came to Bayonne, New Jersey and found a job with one of the oil refineries in Bayonne.

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LEVINE: What had he done when he was in Scotland?

NELSON: He was a coal miner.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

NELSON: In Bathgate.

LEVINE: Did—did he consider this a better job, the one he got here?

NELSON: Never—I don't know. I don't know.

LEVINE: Because he—

NELSON: I don't know.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

NELSON: It isn't something he discussed with a seven year old.

LEVINE: [Laughs] Right. Right, and so—and how about your mother, did she work at all?

NELSON: No.

LEVINE: Either in Scotland or here?

NELSON: No. No, I don't think she worked after she married.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Do you have any memories up until you were seven in Scotland of experiences there?

NELSON: Well, the only thing I—I remember that the homes, the houses were all attached. You know, like in Philadelphia the—

LEVINE: UH-hmm.

NELSON: And they were all—they're brick.

LEVINE: Like a row house.

NELSON: Brick. A row house, brick.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

NELSON: They were like apartments, if you wanted to call them that, upstairs and downstairs. And beyond them, were fields where the tenants could have gardens.

LEVINE: Oh.

NELSON: I remember that.

LEVINE: Did your family have a garden?

NELSON: I'm sure they did.

LEVINE: Do you remember?

NELSON: I'm sure they did. And there was a railroad that ran through town. Not through our area, but you could walk to a railroad and the trains went to Edinburgh, Glasgow, whatever.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Was your—what—was Bathgate a small town? A—was it like a city or was it more like a—

NELSON: No, it wasn't. It was a town, rather than city.

LEVINE: UH-hmm.

NELSON: But we—where we lived was outside the town. In other words, to go into the town, you had to walk. Well, it seemed to me we walked uphill and then we had a movie and stores and things like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NELSON: But we didn't live in the town.

LEVINE: I see. So there wasn't like a market day? It was more that there were shops, rather than—

NELSON: Regular shops, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

NELSON: I mean it—it wasn't—

LEVINE: A rural village or anything like that.

NELSON: Oh, no. No.

LEVINE: No, uh-huh. Uh-hmm.

NELSON: Was a town.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Was your family a religious family?

NELSON: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: What religion?

NELSON: We were raised Catholic.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

NELSON: And in fact, I started school over in Scotland. You know, like the first grade, so-to-speak.

LEVINE: A Catholic school?

NELSON: Yeah, uh-hmm.

LEVINE: And do you remember any ceremonies or any kinds of celebrations connected with the church in Scotland? How about like rituals, like either marriage or funerals or anything like that? Do you have any recollection of that from when you were a little girl?

NELSON: No.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NELSON: Only after we came to the United States because the two sisters that came with my father were single women, young single women. I mean my mother, when we came to the United States was only,

what, thirty-one? Thirty-two? Something like that, and being the oldest. So her sisters were quite a bit younger and that—so that I don't think there were any marriages on the other side.

LEVINE: I see.

NELSON: Now, the two sisters that came with us to the United States were the youngest of the seven sisters, in their late teens. Eighteen, nineteen, something like that.

LEVINE: I see. So actually five of your mother's family, five of the sisters by the time you came—you came with two of them. Two of them had come with your father and then your mother.

NELSON: And my mother made five.

LEVINE: So there's five, uh-huh.

NELSON: Two stayed in Scotland.

LEVINE: I see, and did they ever come over later?

NELSON: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NELSON: Oh, later on, of course, one of the—they both visited us in the United States. Yeah, that's right.

LEVINE: But for a visit., not for a—

NELSON: Yeah, just for a visit because they married over there and raised families and stayed there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. How about other things, like do you remember food? Foods that you had in Scotland as a little girl?

NELSON: Oh, well.

LEVINE: Anything in particular?

NELSON: Ah, meat and potatoes. Mainly the Scotch food and then traditional foods at holidays. There was—in Scotland at that time, there was not much observance of Christmas, but New Year's was a big holiday.

LEVINE: What happened then?

NELSON: And then I can remember my mother always about a quarter to midnight scrubbing the kitchen floor to get rid of the old year's dirt. [Laughs] You know, but those are things that just happened. And then we have—you would call it a plum pudding. You know what I mean? That—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NELSON: With all the fruit and stuff in. Well, in Scotland they call it a dumpling and it's a large, with raisins and currants and suet and that kind of stuff in. That was done once a year, too. And then on our table at New Year's Eve, there was a bottle of wine with a plate of shortbread.

LEVINE: Hmm. Do you—that had I guess some significance?

NELSON: It must have, but I don't know what it is.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

NELSON: So that any—see, people visited each other on New Year's Eve and they would be given a glass of wine, you know, and the shortbread.

LEVINE: I see.

NELSON: Something like that.

LEVINE: How about music? Do you have any recollections that pertain to music from when you were a little girl in Scotland?

NELSON: Oh, well, my father played the bagpipes, but—and I—I can't remember. There must have been some music because I know we had an organ in our house and I think one of my mother's youngest sisters took lessons, but I didn't take piano lessons until we came to the United States, when I was nine. Then my mother sent me to piano lessons. But it—I knew most of the music and the songs and things like that.

LEVINE: UH-hmm.

NELSON: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Do you—do—I don't know if you'd want to, but can you remember any now? Would you want to sing a little bit that you remember?

NELSON: Oh, I—No.

LEVINE: No, okay.

NELSON: I'm very happy with my—

LEVINE: I just thought I'd ask.

NELSON: I'm very happy with my knowledge of the piano, but not the voice.

LEVINE: Okay. [Laughs] Okay. So is there anything else that has to do with Scotland that, you know, you consider part of your own personal heritage? Anything else that comes to mind?

NELSON: Oh, I—I remember that not far from where we lived there was a brook or a creek or whatever. They call it a burn in Scotland, but it's a creek, a running water, and they used to have—and it was dotted with mossy stones.

LEVINE: Hmm. Uh-hmm.

NELSON: You know, it was a real pretty thing and then above that, up and above that there was a farm and the cows would be grazing in there. We were scared to death of these cows. They weren't about to butt us, but we were afraid. And we used to play down there a lot.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NELSON: But it was very pretty and the farm was owned by a family named Greenwood. That reason I know that is because it was a real country road that you walked to the Greenwood home. You know, which was the home where—beyond the cattle, you know, and the reason I

know that is because her daughter made our clothes. You know, my mother would take us out there and have us measured for dresses or fancy dresses or what.

LEVINE: Hmm. Can you say anything about the clothing that you wore as a little girl there?

NELSON: Oh, I have a picture. We have beautiful white dresses on. Really, I'm sorry I didn't bring it, but yes, she made beautiful clothes. We had such pretty clothes, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How about shoes and—I mean, did you wear a certain kind of shoe?

NELSON: No.

LEVINE: Or anything in particular that you remember about—

NELSON: No. We weren't exactly peasants, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NELSON: I mean we were pretty comfortable.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NELSON: And pictures from—of us and my parents or any member of the family taken before we came to the United States are very nice.

LEVINE: What would you do? Do you remember going to a studio or something like that for picture taking?

NELSON: No, I don't.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

NELSON: I don't. I really don't. I imagine this is a studio picture, you know, because I guess I was looking at the pictures. I was about five and my sister Catherine would have been nine. She's four years different, and Elizabeth would have been about three.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Hmm.

NELSON: I remember that.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NELSON: But not where it was taken.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the school that you attended for one year there?

NELSON: No, not too much. Catholic school. St. Mary's I believe it was called, but I don't—I just can't picture it in my mind.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NELSON: Being in there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you have any feelings when you found out—do you remember when you found out you were going to America or how you felt about it or any of that?

NELSON: No, no. I don't remember a thing except—in fact, I don't remember being told at all. You know, I can't remember being told, and—but I know the one thing that happened—I don't know whether it was the night before we left or what, but Elizabeth, the one who is just next younger than I am, stepped on a nail, which you know, with packing boxes and things like that. So that had to be taken care of and wrapped up and so on and then in the—it was—wasn't even dawn I think when we left our house with nearly every neighbor trailing behind us down to the train station.

LEVINE: You were walking?

NELSON: Walking.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NELSON: No busses. No, there were no busses. Not in our area, and no cars. And that I remember and—and there was a piper playing as we walked. It was like a grand send off, you know. Well, like I think in all countries at that time when you went to America, it was like a farewell forever, you know. That—that's how they felt.

LEVINE: Wow.

NELSON: But, of course, it wasn't forever because a lot of people came after us.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NELSON: Yes.

LEVINE: Well, how about what your mother packed?

NELSON: Oh, God, I wouldn't know that.

LEVINE: Do you—did you personally bring any particular toy or anything with you?

NELSON: No. I—that I don't remember. I don't remember that. No, I can't remember that.

LEVINE: Do you remember saying goodbye to either some of your aunts or your friends?

NELSON: Two girlfriends, you know, seven, eight, whatever they were. I even remember their names. Teresa Calica [ph] and Mary Norris. Two—I never saw them again, but those two I said goodbye to.

LEVINE: Wow. So then you got the train, is that right?

NELSON: We got the train.

LEVINE: In—in Bathgate?

NELSON: In Bathgate to Glasgow.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NELSON: Or, we didn't sail out of Glasgow. We sailed out of Greenuck [PH], which I'm sure is a port of Glasgow. Maybe. I don't know. But we had to take a small boat out to the big boat, you know. I mean—

LEVINE: Was there any delay or was there any time between when you got to the port and—and you actually left? I mean did you stay for a while either in Glasgow or—

NELSON: No, no. No, it—no.

LEVINE: No.

NELSON: We—we boarded almost right away. Yeah.

LEVINE: And the name of the ship?

NELSON: Columbia.

LEVINE: Columbia, and do you remember anything about the Columbia or about the passage?

NELSON: I have no idea, except that we had cabins facing each other. Little—little narrow walkway, let's say and a cabin on—facing each other.

LEVINE: Oh.

NELSON: That all seven of us occupied.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NELSON: And Elizabeth, her foot, she couldn't walk on it, you know, so the two aunts—the young aunts—they helped her. She tells me this. I don't even remember that, but she says, "Don't you remember I was

hobbling around? They were—they were half carrying me around.”
I—no, I don’t remember that, but—

LEVINE: Did you go around the ship? Did you have—

NELSON: I don’t remember. I—except once when somebody said—we were on deck when somebody sighted a whale, which was a big deal to a child and that—that’s all I remember.

LEVINE: Do you remember the food at all?

NELSON: No. No.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything your mother told you about, you know, what America was like or—did you have any idea of what it was going to mean to you to be in America then?

NELSON: It really didn’t impress me at that age.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NELSON: I mean, I didn’t even question why we were there. You know what I mean?

LEVINE: Sure.

NELSON: It was just something, my parents brought me there. However, the one thing that impressed me at the time was there was a lot of snow. You know, because we left Scotland January 27th and after coming across the ocean in the Columbia, then delayed ten days in Hoffman

Island, I guess it was—well, we arrived on Ash Wednesday, whenever that was, I don't know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm. So March probably.

NELSON: Probably March, and then I had my eighth birthday after we got here in that March.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Uh-huh.

NELSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh. So just—did—just to backtrack a little bit, do you—do you have any memories of experiences with your father before he left for America? The year before you did? I mean when you were a little girl, what kind of a man was he? Was he strict? Was he—

NELSON: Oh, quiet.

LEVINE: Quiet?

NELSON: My mother was the strict one. You know, she was very strict, but my father was a very quiet man. Very. And having only girls, there wasn't much he could talk to us about, you know. And no, he—he was a really—a good man, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NELSON: A religious man, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh.

NELSON: Hmm.

LEVINE: How about your mother or your father, were there any values that they tried to teach you? Were there—or your mother, as far as being strict, what was she strict about?

NELSON: Oh, being a lady. Learning how to sit, to walk, to—you know, the usual things. When we were going to school, she would watch us from the window. I remember. And this is the United States.

LEVINE: Oh.

NELSON: When we were going to school. And when we came home, “Straighten that back of yours.” You know, that type of thing.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NELSON: Very strict along those lines.

LEVINE: Was she herself very much a lady? I mean, was she—

NELSON: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NELSON: She was.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NELSON: Very much so. They were—they weren't terribly well off when she was growing up, you know, and yet they all turned out to be very nice women. All the women, hmm.

LEVINE: Were you closest to any particular one of your aunts?

NELSON: Oh, yes, I was. The one next in age to my mother called Elizabeth. I was very fond of her.

LEVINE: What was it about her that you—

NELSON: I don't know. I don't know. She was—she was just nice.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NELSON: You know? And she used to make—could it be because she always gave us such beautiful gifts, I don't know?

LEVINE: Like what might she have given you? What did she give you for gifts? Do you remember?

NELSON: She always—she gave us scooters. Not what you know as motor scooters. I mean scooters one foot on, one foot off. That type of thing, but she gave us scooters. She gave us watches. She gave us pendants. You know, really. She was very—but beside all that, she was very much a lady, you know. Really nice.

LEVINE: Now, was she one of the aunts who came with you or had she come with your father?

NELSON: No, she's the one that came with my father.

LEVINE: Father.

NELSON: She and another one.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. So do you remember when the Columbia came into the New York Harbor?

NELSON: No.

LEVINE: So—but—and what were your impressions of Ellis Island? What happened to you and your family when you came?

NELSON: Well, of course, you have to—you have to go in back of Ellis Island to Hoffman Island because we went to Hoffman Island first—

LEVINE: And why—

NELSON: Not Ellis Island first.

LEVINE: Okay, why was that?

NELSON: Because the two youngest, Elizabeth and Mary, had the chicken pox. So I guess we were into the, you know, harbor and we were all taken off the ship down these big rope ladders. Sailors taking us kids down and into the little boat and we went from there to Hoffman Island.

LEVINE: The whole family, including the aunts--

NELSON: The whole family.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NELSON: When we got there—have you been there? Never?

LEVINE: Describe it, if you can.

NELSON: Huge.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NELSON: Well, to me, a little kid it was huge and this big building, hospital building and we were all ushered into this large room. Huge room, and they took the two little ones with the chicken pox off and away, I suppose to put them to bed or whatever. The rest of us, these two nurses came and said “Strip.” All of us. That was three—two kids and three adults and we had to strip off all our clothes. We stood there like Jaybirds, but anyway, it didn’t mean anything to me. But years later with my aunts talking about it, it was really funny.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NELSON: I suppose they were going to disinfect our clothes because they gave us gowns, you know, like hospital gowns. They took all our clothes. We got them back later.

LEVINE: How were you treated, generally?

NELSON: Oh, beautifully. Beautifully. And this—when we went into the—the room, it was like a dormitory with beds on both sides. It seemed to me. I don’t know, maybe a child’s impression. It seems to me there were no end to the beds, you know, and the two younger kids were in

bed and we were assigned beds. There were no other patients in it.
No other patients at that time.

LEVINE: On the whole island or in that particular room?

NELSON: Not in—in this dormitory I didn't see any.

LEVINE: No, uh-hmm.

NELSON: No, there was nobody there. And there was a young doctor and there were several nurses and, oh, they were just beautiful. Treated us beautifully and we ate our meals in a separate building with staff, patients, I don't know. There was an awful lot of building. It was very good food. So my father, who was already here in the United States, and one of my aunts who came with him, they came to visit us when we were on Hoffman Island, but they couldn't come beyond the beach, you see. They couldn't come in and enter any of the buildings.

LEVINE: Were you allowed to go out to the beach?

NELSON: Yeah. We were allowed in and out. I mean we weren't quarantined as far as that's concerned.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Just being there was the quarantine, rather than—

NELSON: Being there, yeah, that was enough.

LEVINE: And the two little ones—

NELSON: They were kept in bed.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Wow. So, in 1923 Hoffman Island, would you say it was a lot of people were there at that time? Or—

NELSON: Well—

LEVINE: Do you have any sense of how much was going on there when you— in that period of time?

NELSON: No, I have no idea except that there were no other people in the beds.

LEVINE: Right.

NELSON: In the separate building where we went to get our meals, there seemed to be a lot of people. I don't know whether they were staff or—or what. I don't know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Was the place run down at that time?

NELSON: Oh, no.

LEVINE: It was in good condition?

NELSON: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NELSON: It's a beautiful big building.

LEVINE: Is there anything about the building that you could describe?

NELSON: No.

LEVINE: Anything in particular?

NELSON: No, I can't.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

NELSON: Except to me it was large.

LEVINE: Yes, uh-huh. And how about the surroundings, like outside the building? Was there anything about that that sticks in your mind?

NELSON: No, just the beach that I remember my father and my aunt coming and brought éclairs, which we hadn't seen before. A box from the bakery with éclairs in it. I—

LEVINE: We're going to pause right here so we can turn the tape over and then we'll continue.

NELSON: Sure.

END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: Okay, I was speaking with Mrs. Nelson about Hoffman Island, where she and her family were detained for ten days due to the chicken pox of your youngest sisters.

NELSON: Yes.

LEVINE: The two younger sisters. How did you fill your time during those ten days?

NELSON: You know, I often wonder. I can't remember. I really—I can't remember. I can remember going there and being admitted there, you know what I mean? But I wonder what I did. Or my older sister, you know, what—what did we do? I can't remember.

LEVINE: Hmm. And how about Swinburne Island. That's right near Hoffman Island. Was there any—

NELSON: Oh, I never heard of that.

LEVINE: No, okay. And as far as the treatment that your two younger sisters received, do you have any—

NELSON: Oh, I don't know about that either.

LEVINE: Okay.

NELSON: No.

LEVINE: And—well, it sounds as though it was not a bad experience.

NELSON: Oh, no, no, no, no, never. We all talked about Hoffman Island, you know, with affection actually.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NELSON: It was such a nice place and everyone was so nice to us.

LEVINE: And what happened when—do you remember learning that you were about to leave and—and what happened when you left there? Where did you go?

NELSON: We went—then we went to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: And what were your impressions of Ellis Island?

NELSON: Oh, well, the only thing I know of Ellis Island was going into a large room with these long tables and wondering what that smell was. You know, there was a smell that was unknown to me. Coffee. Something Scottish people didn't drink. They are tea drinkers, you know, and this was coffee. And spaghetti. I saw people eating spaghetti which I never—I didn't know what it was either. But as I say, we were not detained in any way. We were not questioned. We were not interviewed, nothing. I suppose having been on Hoffman Island in quarantine meant that we were in pretty good health. So we just went through and my father met us. We got on a train and we were going to Bayonne, New Jersey because my father had two sisters living there. And if you ever went at that time, the Central Railroad was the railroad that ran from Jersey City to Bayonne and we're sitting looking out the window. Well, railroad flats are not the most attractive things in the world, you know, and at that time they

weren't and we're going—we're going and my mother's looking out. I remember this so well because I thought—you have to—you would have to have known this woman. She's looking out the window and these awful rundown looking buildings we're passing on the train and she says, "Is this what I left Scotland for?" [Laughs] But it wasn't so bad once we got to Bayonne, you know. The Boulevard had beautiful houses on it and everything, where my father's sisters lived. Of course, there was a huge party on our arrival, but as I say, there was snow all over the ground, which was a big surprise to me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, when you first saw your father, I take it it was—it was at Hoffman Island when he—

NELSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: What was it like for you as a little girl to see him after a year?

NELSON: Well, I think—I think I was more interested in the éclairs. [Laughs] But anyway.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. [Laughing]

NELSON: No, we were very happy to see him. I'm sure my mother was very happy to see him and I'm sure he was worried because the only notification he could have had was to go to Ellis Island expecting to see us and finding that we're not there. That I'm assuming is the case.

LEVINE: So it was family members and—and—and--their friends who—who greeted you when you finally got to Bayonne?

NELSON: Oh, it was all family.

LEVINE: All family.

NELSON: Was all family. It was my father's family. His two sisters and they—they were much older than he. He was next to the youngest. These two sisters were the two oldest and they had grown families. So that there were a lot of people. Lot of people. Both sides of my family were a lot of people. Cousins by the dozens, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Do you remember any other first impressions of those first few days or—or weeks in—in America, in Bayonne?

NELSON: Well—

LEVINE: Any things that stand out that struck you?

NELSON: Well, on the street where my father rented a house, it was just a block long, but it had about four or five different nationalities. It was really something, you know, to meet all the—and all the children, of course were our age, so that we had a lot of companions and we all got along just fine. You know, children adjust very quickly.

LEVINE: What was it like for you going to school then?

NELSON: Well, another St. Mary's I went to and the only thing was, I had had a first grade in Scotland, but when I went to school here with my sister Elizabeth, they put us both in the same class, which was first grade. I really should have gone into second grade, and that was a little bit, you know—

LEVINE: You felt badly that you were—

NELSON: Yeah, right, uh-huh, but I got used to it.

LEVINE: How about your teachers or—was—was there a big difference in this school?

NELSON: Oh, no.

LEVINE: This St. Mary's compared with the St. Mary's in Scotland?

NELSON: No. No. All nuns. It was all nuns.

LEVINE: And it was all nuns in Scotland, too. Uh-huh. Yeah, and were they more strict, less strict?

NELSON: Oh, it was all up to the individual nun.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NELSON: You know, some were nice and some were strict. It wasn't a case of everybody being, you know, strict. Some were—had a sense of humor. You know, it was all—they were all individuals. I mean, they all looked alike, but they were all different.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. How about being called a 'greenhorn'? Did you ever have any experiences—

NELSON: No. No.

LEVINE: Where people—

NELSON: No.

LEVINE: Somehow were prejudiced against the immigrants?

NELSON: No. I think because of the different—we had German, Irish, Scotch, Jewish, Swedish, all mixed up in this little neighborhood and who's going to call who a 'greenhorn'? Really? [Laughs] Ohhh.

LEVINE: So that means that you really were in a school with children from all nationalities?

NELSON: Uh-huh. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NELSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, and let's see. So you went—you went to school and—and then how long did you stay in school? Did you go to high school?

NELSON: Oh, yeah, but by that time we had moved out of Bayonne.

LEVINE: Oh.

NELSON: We moved out of Bayonne in the seventh grade. I was in the seventh grade, and we came to Roselle Park and we went to St. Joseph's to finish our eighth grade.

LEVINE: Were you—were—was your family involved with a—a community of Scots here in this country? Did they have like a club or anything like that?

NELSON: That was Carney, New Jersey. That was all Scottish, you know, in Carney where all the Scots went, but no. My mother was mostly into family, her sisters, you know, that sort of thing.

LEVINE: Do you have any sense of how the ties were maintained between the rest of the family who was still in Scotland, once you got here?

NELSON: Oh, it was just a case of correspondence, that's all.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NELSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Was your mother trying to hold onto the Scottish customs or were—was the attitude to become American or how—

NELSON: Oh, no. No, she was—she liked the traditional stuff and—but she—I don't think she would have wanted to go back, but as far as, you know, the food at the holidays, as I said, things like that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NELSON: Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: So there isn't a sense that you have of your mother or even yourself of something you were sorry to have left behind, except maybe for people that, you know—

NELSON: I was never sorry, no. But you see, there was a sad event happened because in 1925, two years after we came to the United States, my sister Catherine died. That was the oldest one.

LEVINE: What did she die of?

NELSON: She had Rheumatic Fever.

LEVINE: Was that—was there a lot of Rheumatic Fever—

NELSON: I have no idea.

LEVINE: Around? Uh-huh.

NELSON: I have no idea. And that was very, very hard on my mother. That was really a tragic thing. You know, then of course you don't know what she's thinking. You know, I mean she—she just was devastated. So she sent—so my sister Elizabeth and I, we went to a Catholic camp for two weeks because this was in—she died in July and I guess it was just my mother was so devastated that we were sent to this camp for two weeks. We had a ball. We had a wonderful time. It was really a nice camp on Staten Island, in fact it was.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm, and did your father continue to work in—in the oil refinery?

NELSON: All his life, up until retirement, the same company.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Well, just to jump a little bit, how—how did you meet your husband?

NELSON: Oh, my goodness. At a party at his house. He and his brother were having a party and another date took me to the party. That was it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and was your—was your—had your husband immigrated or has—was he an American born?

NELSON: My husband was born in the state of Washington of Swedish background and when he was five, I think he and his brother—brother was about three, my husband was about five—they went back to Sweden because their father had tuberculosis and wasn't expected to survive, and he wanted to go back to his native country. So their mother with a sick husband and two little boys took a train from the West Coast, which was the state of Washington, all the way out to New York and before they got there, they were in a train accident. You should hear this woman tell the story.

LEVINE: Hmm. So they went back to Sweden and when did your husband then come back again?

NELSON: Yeah, they—he came—in fact, he came back in the same year I did.

LEVINE: Oh.

NELSON: 1923.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NELSON: And then I forget where they settled, but anyway.

LEVINE: What was your husband's name?

NELSON: Earl.

LEVINE: Earl, and how many children did you have?

NELSON: Two sons.

LEVINE: Scott and?

NELSON: Craig and Craig died two years ago. So—

LEVINE: Hmm. Well, when you look back on your immigration experience coming to this country as a seven year old girl and—and staying here, how do you think about it? How do you think about the fact that you came here, rather than stay—staying in Scotland and your life here?

NELSON: Well—well, I—I really didn't give much thought, as far as comparing the two, but as far as being here, I always enjoyed my work. I was a secretary most of my working career and worked for a couple of large corporations and enjoyed it. I loved it. That's about it. I mean, I don't think I would have had that opportunity if I had stayed over in Scotland.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. How do you—how do you think about yourself in terms of being a Scot and being an American? Do—do you—

NELSON: Oh, I'm very proud of my background. Very, and I'm proud to be an American, too, you know. But you don't forget. You know, I mean when you're surrounded by all Scots when I was growing up, you

know, at the parties, the singing the old songs, and you know, telling the old stories, it's something that just gets inside of you. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm. So it's part of who you are.

NELSON: Of course.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Did you try to pass on any values to your sons that perhaps your mother and father passed onto you or any other kinds of values that you wanted?

NELSON: Oh, I can't remember.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NELSON: They both turned out to be very good men, so I'm proud of that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. I was going to ask you that. What gives you satisfaction that you have done?

NELSON: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Very good.

LEVINE: And how about your life now, now that you—you're retired and your children are grown? How is life for you at this stage?

NELSON: Oh, I'm enjoying my retirement, you know, and I live by myself and I read a lot and I go out. I drive. I still drive and I have no problems.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NELSON: And no physical health problems.

LEVINE: Oh, that's wonderful.

NELSON: Except a little back ache once in a while, but that's to be expected.
[Laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm.

NELSON: But otherwise I'm—I'm quite happy.

LEVINE: Great. Is there anything else that you can think of that maybe has come to mind since we've been talking or anything else that you'd like to say before we close?

NELSON: No, I can't think of anything. You had asked me about would my sister be interested in an interview.

LEVINE: Right.

NELSON: But I asked her about it. This is Elizabeth.

LEVINE: Right.

NELSON: And she said she didn't know what she could contribute, you know.

LEVINE: Okay.

NELSON: Because she hasn't got—doesn't remember as much as I remembered.

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LEVINE: Right. Well, people often say that and then once we start talking, they do remember.

NELSON: Of course.

LEVINE: And—and also there's the part about being in this country, which she probably remembers, you know, more than Scotland but—

NELSON: Possibly.

LEVINE: All right, well, we can talk about that, but I just want to thank you for a most interesting interview. It's been a pleasure.

NELSON: Well, I'm glad. I'm glad.

LEVINE: And I've been speaking with Ann Nelson, who came in 1923 at the age of seven from Scotland. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service on December 8th, 1996 here at Ellis Island. Signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW

