

EI-853

FRANCES DUFFY HOFFMAN

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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NORTHERN IRELAND, 1923

AGE: 21

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PORT:

RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Okay, this is—this is—this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. And I'm here today in St. Petersburg in Paneles [PH] Park with Frances Hoffman, who was born Frances Duffy and is from Northern Ireland, came through Ellis Island on August 24, 1923 at the age of 21 years.

HOFFMAN: August—

LEVINE: At the time of this interview, Mrs. Hoffman is 95 years.

HOFFMAN: Next month.

LEVINE: Next month?

HOFFMAN: [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Right, okay. You'll be 95 next month so—

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HOFFMAN: Twentieth of March.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay, if you would say again your birth date and where in Ireland you started out.

HOFFMAN: On the—oh, well, when I left to come here, you mean?

LEVINE: Well, were you—when you—were you born in the same place that you lived until you came here?

HOFFMAN: That's right.

LEVINE: Okay.

HOFFMAN: Londonderry.

LEVINE: Londonderry.

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay.

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And your birth date, again.

HOFFMAN: Twentieth of March, 1902.

LEVINE: Okay. And your mother's name?

HOFFMAN: Grace Gallagher—G-A-L-L-A-G-H-E-R.

LEVINE: Her first name?

HOFFMAN: Grace.

LEVINE: Grace.

HOFFMAN: G-R-A-C-E.

LEVINE: Grace, Grace. Oh, Grace, okay. And your father's name?

HOFFMAN: Edward John—

LEVINE: Edward—Edward John—

HOFFMAN: —Duffy.

LEVINE: Okay, and did you have brothers and sisters? When you were born, were there other children?

HOFFMAN: I had—I had seven—it was eight girls. Two died at birth and six lived on. They're all gone except me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Were you the baby of the family?

HOFFMAN: I was the oldest.

LEVINE: You were the oldest.

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay, and then you had five sisters.

HOFFMAN: Five sisters beside myself.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, okay.

HOFFMAN: Two died at birth; there would be eight girls.

LEVINE: Okay. Do you remember your grandparents?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes. My mother's father and mother [several words unclear] in a place called Louthmaloran, County [unclear]. That's in the North of Ireland too.

LEVINE: Could you spell the name of the towns?

HOFFMAN: L-O-U-T-H-M-A-L-O-R-A-N. It's near Birkenport [PH], which is a big port.

LEVINE: Okay.

HOFFMAN: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And your grandfather and your grandmother lived there?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, my grandfather died when I was about a year or two years old. But my grandmother lived on till she was 86.

LEVINE: And do you remember going to your grandmother's house?

HOFFMAN: We used to do that for a school vacation.

LEVINE: You used—I'm—say—say—

HOFFMAN: School vacation.

LEVINE: Oh, school vacation. And what was your grandmother like and how did you—what did you do when you—

HOFFMAN: Oh, she spoke—she spoke English but not so good. They all spoke Gaelic—Gaelic in that part of the country.

LEVINE: And could—did you understand Gaelic?

HOFFMAN: Well, no, but my mother spoke [unclear] that. She spoke English to me. My grandmother spoke English [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and what kinds of things would you do on vacation at your grandmother's?

HOFFMAN: Probably go out and start a little fire outside with the turf. It was always turf. They didn't burn coal; they burned turf.

LEVINE: So would you gather the turf?

HOFFMAN: Well, it was right there. They burned it [several words unclear]. We'd build a little fire, build [unclear]. They got a little [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what else do you remember about your grandmother's house and your visits?

HOFFMAN: Well, my—my granddaughter—my Aunt Bridgett, my mother's sister—she was the local [unclear] for our—for milk for our tea. We drank tea [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: Which was awful good. Now, that—she would take us to visit the different people.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: Huh.

LEVINE: And would you go with your sisters?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, but I was mostly sent down there, the oldest.

LEVINE: Oh, I see.

HOFFMAN: My sister was small [unclear]. Two or three would go at a time.

LEVINE: I see. Would—did you have special privileges, being the oldest?

HOFFMAN: Well, I was responsible for good behavior with the others.

LEVINE: You had more work to do as the oldest, I guess.

HOFFMAN: I was always responsible for the baby. Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you learned to be a little mother with all your sisters coming along and having to take care of them.

HOFFMAN: Yeah, huh. Yeah. I was responsible for the baby, washing the baby's diapers. I know that.

LEVINE: And where did you wash them? What was the situation with washing them?

HOFFMAN: Oh. Oh, we had plenty of water. We had [unclear] plenty of water.

LEVINE: Did you have hot running water in the house?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes. Oh, we've got lots in later years. No problem [unclear]. We had cold water [unclear] hot water [unclear]. We had all the [unclear] electric. We had gas. [several words unclear] had electric.

LEVINE: Do you remember when you got electricity?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, I must be about 10 or 11.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was that a big treat when you first got it?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes. It was the first time [several words unclear] traffic lights.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. And how did people get around in town? How did you get from one place to another?

HOFFMAN: Well, they had—they [unclear] to have buses by—and [unclear] they had horse trams. We called them [unclear] streetcars with the horses.

LEVINE: Would it be like a cart? A horse with a cart?

HOFFMAN: No, [unclear] trolley car. Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, but it was pulled by horses?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, by two horses.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, what did your father do?

HOFFMAN: He was—he was a bookkeeper.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: [several words unclear] for a big firm.

LEVINE: And do you remember the house you lived in—

HOFFMAN: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: —growing up?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Could you describe it?

HOFFMAN: Oh, we had kitchen, parlor and three bedrooms and an attic.

LEVINE: Do you remember particular foods that your mother cooked?

HOFFMAN: [several words unclear] just usual. She made stew and—and chicken—Christmas.

LEVINE: Chicken for Christmas?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, and Easter. Yeah. [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: Do you remember any ceremonies around birth or marriage or death or religious ceremonies of any kind?

HOFFMAN: No, they didn't go in for that there in that town. It was a Presbyterian town.

LEVINE: How about communion?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Can you describe your communion?

HOFFMAN: Oh, we had our First Communion. We always had our breakfast in the convent where we went to school. We went to [unclear] Convent School and we [unclear] First Communion. We had our breakfast in the convent.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you would have—you would have your breakfast with the nuns in the convent?

HOFFMAN: Well, no. The nuns [unclear].

LEVINE: Oh, the—all the girls who were making that—

HOFFMAN: All the ones that were making communion would be served [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you remember your communion day?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I certainly do. I was nine years old.

LEVINE: Was there anything very special that happened to you on that day?

HOFFMAN: No, just as a—and the priest told us It was the happiest day of our lives. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And did you feel happy?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yeah. Felt growing up.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And were you closest to any particular sister?

HOFFMAN: Well, the one that was teaching the class, I was close to her.

LEVINE: The one that was—

HOFFMAN: Teaching the class.

LEVINE: Teaching the class.

HOFFMAN: Yeah. [unclear] close to her. Everybody [unclear].

WOMAN: She thinks you're talking about the nuns.

LEVINE: Oh, oh. The sisters. No, I mean your own sisters. The ones in your family. Were you particularly close to them?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, I was real, real close to my sister, Bridgett. And she died before 18.

LEVINE: Oh.

HOFFMAN: She died the first year I come out here.

LEVINE: So she was in Ireland—

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —and you were here when she died?

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: She died [unclear] 18 years old.

LEVINE: I see. And what did she die of?

HOFFMAN: TB.

LEVINE: TB. Was there—do you remember any instances of sickness in Northern Ireland when you were there?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, the flu [unclear] of 1918. The flu was very bad.

LEVINE: And what do you remember about that?

HOFFMAN: Well, I remember everybody was sick in bed except me. And I used to sit in one chair [several words unclear] get up with mother to—she was in the [several words unclear] cup of tea. [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: Huh.

LEVINE: Did people actually die of the flu?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yeah. They had enough [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Do you remember any medical practices or folk practices? Like, if somebody—if something happened, a disease or— or—or—or any other kind of malady that were used when you were growing up?

HOFFMAN: No, they had a doctor.

LEVINE: They had a doctor.

HOFFMAN: Uh-huh. We had a doctor and when they come on a horse my mother felt better.

LEVINE: [chuckles] And how about the pharmacist? Did—were there pharmacists?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yeah. Oh, of course. Oh, they had everything.

LEVINE: Well, did—was the pharmacist a person that you went to for advice if you were ill?

HOFFMAN: No.

LEVINE: No, you just went to the doctor.

HOFFMAN: The doctor.

LEVINE: Okay.

HOFFMAN: And there were plenty of doctors around town.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what do you remember about the town of Londonderry when were growing you?

HOFFMAN: Well, they had different parades through the year. It's all by [several words unclear] some battle, and a different parade from different years.

LEVINE: And was the parade—did everybody turn out and—

HOFFMAN: No, just the ones that were in the parade.

LEVINE: Oh, [chuckles] right. Did you ever march in a parade?

HOFFMAN: No. [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: What would the parade look like? What—

HOFFMAN: Well—

LEVINE: Who—who would be in it? What would be the nature of—

HOFFMAN: Well, the man would be marching. The man [several words unclear] and he'd march, and bands, plenty of bands. And there were drums and—

LEVINE: Did you like to dance?

HOFFMAN: Not much. No, we had dancing in the [unclear]. The—what do you call it? The [unclear] in the dancing room. What is the name for it? Kudrose [PH]?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And how about singing? Singing.

HOFFMAN: Oh, there—well, you see, there was no TV, no radio at the time. [unclear] they made their own music. Everybody had [several words unclear]. There were a lot of—a lot of fun before they ever had the TVs or the radios.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Would people visit, say, on Sunday afternoon? Was that usual?

HOFFMAN: Well, Sunday wasn't so good for visiting because everybody went to their own church. And [several words unclear]. There was no movies and there was no—no public houses, no bars open. It was a Presbyterian town. They were very strict. But now, I think that's all over. The bars [several words unclear]. Maybe [unclear] go a couple hours on a Sunday.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: So when would you get together? When would people come by and— and—and you would sing and—

HOFFMAN: Oh, anytime.

LEVINE: Anytime.

HOFFMAN: Anytime, visit. [unclear] we had visitors.

LEVINE: Do you remember the names of any of the songs that you sang?

HOFFMAN: Ah, they were [unclear] [chuckles] songs. "By a Long, Long Trail."
[unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What kind of a voice did you have?

HOFFMAN: Soprano.

LEVINE: Soprano.

HOFFMAN: My sister [several words unclear]. She was already good singer.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: [unclear] my mother and father and her singing.

LEVINE: Now, which sister was that?

HOFFMAN: My sister, Rose.

LEVINE: And did you play instruments?

HOFFMAN: Well, [several words unclear] and we had a piano.

LEVINE: You had a piano in the house?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yeah. We always had a piano.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And who played that?

HOFFMAN: Well, we all learned to play. We were all sent to music school [unclear]
after school.

LEVINE: After school you would go to music school.

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

- LEVINE: And what was music school like? Do you—can you remember anything about that?
- HOFFMAN: Well, it was just a—the one teacher [several words unclear]. It was private—private teacher. And then when you got better at it, we got together.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh. And, [clears throat] let's see, you went to school. How long did you stay in school?
- HOFFMAN: Until I was 16.
- LEVINE: And then what did you do?
- HOFFMAN: Well, [unclear] dressmaker.
- LEVINE: Oh.
- HOFFMAN: [sentence unclear]. And I hated it. [laughter] My mother made me [unclear]. [chuckles]
- LEVINE: Well, who did you make dresses for?
- HOFFMAN: Well, my sister [unclear] make blouses for her. [laughs] [unclear] just for the [unclear].
- LEVINE: Did—did everyone have their clothes made or could you—
- HOFFMAN: No.
- LEVINE: —go to the store and buy clothes too?
- HOFFMAN: [sentence unclear]. Everybody went to these dressmakers to get their clothes made—to the dressmakers in the town [unclear]. [several words unclear] what you call ready to wear in stores [unclear].
- LEVINE: They started to open before you left?
- HOFFMAN: Oh, years before.
- LEVINE: Years before. Oh.
- HOFFMAN: Oh, well, [unclear].
- LEVINE: And do you remember how you dressed when you—when you were young in—

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —in Northern Ireland?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, dresses. My mother was a very good sewer. She used to make our clothes when we went to school. I don't know where she got the strength from because there was no washing machines then, and you had to launder everything by starch [several words unclear]. What else?

LEVINE: When you were working as a dressmaker—

HOFFMAN: Oh, I was just serving my time. We had to serve three years to—

LEVINE: You had to—

HOFFMAN: You had to serve your time, serve apprenticeship.

LEVINE: Oh, and who—you did an apprenticeship under a dressmaker?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, that's right.

LEVINE: Do you remember that person?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, it was three sisters and they were all dressmakers.

LEVINE: And what would you do? Would you go to their house or their [unclear]?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yeah. Their house—nine o'clock in the morning till six in the evening.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: Was there any part of dressmaking that you enjoyed?

HOFFMAN: None. I hated it.

LEVINE: [laughs] Was there something else you wanted to do?

HOFFMAN: I wanted to be a teacher.

LEVINE: W—was that not possible?

HOFFMAN: Well, I probably wasn't smart enough but I had a sister who was a schoolteacher [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how did you get around? Did you have a bicycle or how did you—

HOFFMAN: Oh, yeah. We—we had bicycles. And then we had a long walk to school.

LEVINE: How long?

HOFFMAN: Oh, a couple of miles through the streets and we didn't think [unclear] of it. But now, they have buses [unclear].

LEVINE: Was this a Catholic school?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, convent school.

LEVINE: Convent school.

HOFFMAN: Yeah. And it was known for—you had to buy your own books. My mother and father'd buy all books for—

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And let's see. Well, how was it decided that you would come to America?

HOFFMAN: I just—well, my—my mother and my sister, Rose, had a plan that Rose would come out [unclear] America. But there wasn't [unclear] about me going. And finally, my mother took my sister over [unclear] to say goodbye to my aunt [several words unclear]. [several sentences unclear]. "Why don't you? You can stay with me for awhile till you get a job.

LEVINE: Your neighbor was in America.

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And she said if you came over—

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —you could stay with her.

HOFFMAN: Yeah. And my mother [several words unclear]. "You let Rose go. You got to let [unclear]."

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Why was it that Rose went?

HOFFMAN: Well, I—I don't know, to tell you the truth. [sentence unclear]. Jobs were hard to find. [several words unclear] paid very little.

LEVINE: What did Rose do? Did she have a—an occupation that she did in Ireland?

HOFFMAN: [unclear]. She went after school [unclear]. My mother sent her to an academy where she learned typing and shorthand. She was an expert in that but she never worked at it. So she figured she'd come to America [unclear]. But when she came to America she went in for nursing. She always wanted to be a nurse and she was an RN. She became an RN.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: My mother used to [several words unclear]. [several words unclear] and sell them to her.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And let's see. Well, when you said, "You have to let me go," your mother agreed.

HOFFMAN: [several words unclear] sister [several words unclear]. She had the [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so do you remember what you had to do in preparation to go to America?

HOFFMAN: Well, the only thing I had to do was go to Belfast [several words unclear] for your—for your visa. You had to go to Belfast and go through the American embassy.

LEVINE: And then what did you get from the embassy?

HOFFMAN: Well, there you get your stamp and [unclear].

LEVINE: Were you examined at all—

HOFFMAN: Oh—

LEVINE: —in Belfast?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, [several words unclear] exam. Well, then [unclear] when my sister, Rose came, she came [unclear]. And she just walked off the

ship. But when I came I came [unclear]—steerage, they called it then [unclear]. And I—well, when I came it was a Sunday we arrived. And that's why I got—mixed up my papers. I said I arrived on the first when [unclear] paper come back from [unclear]. I came in on the second [unclear] Sunday. The next day was Labor Day, the first Monday in September. And when we come in, then they used to—on the—the ships used to [unclear]. The first—first trips then were taken to Ellis Island. I mean, the passengers. They had—had—anyway, I—we arrived the Sunday morning but the next day was Labor Day. Well, the ships ahead of us [unclear] before the first. They were waiting in line so we had to wait a week.

LEVINE: On the ship?

HOFFMAN: On at the ship. We had to wait a whole week and that was 1923. And we waited a week and then there were [unclear] on a Friday. And then that was Sunday. We arrived Monday. It was Labor Day and we didn't get to Ellis Island till Friday. And they said in the newspaper—I didn't think we'd get in the newspaper but then talk about—they said that it was the finest bunch of young immigrants to have landed in quite awhile. And the [several words unclear]. They took us to Ellis Island. Anyway, the—the [several words unclear] big ship was [unclear] had to be taken from the German government and given to the—to America [unclear] war—First World War. And—

LEVINE: The name of the ship that you were on?

HOFFMAN: Oh, the California was the ship I came on, was the maiden voyage, was the ship that [several words unclear]. They had—L-E-V-R-A-T-H-E or something, Levrathe, [unclear] called. The [unclear] was name of the [unclear] that came on the [unclear] on a Friday morning. [unclear] the pier. And now, last weekend we stayed in the—New York in the ship. They took us off the California about two days [unclear] and put us on another ship belonging to the [unclear] before they had arrangements made for the California to do something. [unclear]

LEVINE: Can you say anything about the maiden voyage of the California?

HOFFMAN: Most of the people were sick on account of [unclear] paint.

LEVINE: The smell of paint? Huh.

HOFFMAN: But there was concerts every night and the singing and we used to hear [unclear] singer. There were four girls of us and—

LEVINE: You were traveling together, the four of you?

HOFFMAN: No—no, [unclear] among ourselves.

LEVINE: Oh, but you met them on the ship?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, the four—four of us were in a cabin.

LEVINE: And you were singing and dancing every night?

HOFFMAN: Every night dancing [unclear]. We could hear them because we were sick [unclear]. [laughs]

LEVINE: And what did you know about America? Can you remember what you expected before you actually got here?

HOFFMAN: Well, I didn't expect much because I didn't hear people say good things about [unclear]. It just—it was a big step.

LEVINE: Yes, it was.

HOFFMAN: [unclear] this lady came to Ellis Island [unclear] sister and she was [unclear] about the—and [several words unclear] Ellis Island when we were sitting there. I see [several words unclear] and she got up and he sat down. And so when the man came we were put [several words unclear]. But they were steel cages. I call them cages [unclear] room for the—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: —[several words unclear]. “Are you happy about everything?” [unclear] Irish [several words unclear]. And I said, “No, I'm not. I've never seen [unclear].” [several words unclear] and he said [several words unclear]. You're like all the others. [unclear] speak English. Everybody else knows [unclear]. That's for sure. [several sentences unclear].

LEVINE: Okay, we're going to stop here. [tape off/on] Okay, so did you have animals when you were young as well?

HOFFMAN: Well, no my mother didn't let any animals in the house. [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: I see. So you're making up for it now, huh? [chuckles] Okay, so you didn't really know what to expect. Do you know what you expected to do?

HOFFMAN: Well, anything. I just didn't expect anything. [unclear] this lady went to school when my mother did. She came to Ellis Island and I went with her and her sister to the home in Brooklyn. They lived in Brooklyn [unclear].

LEVINE: Now, did this woman come to Ellis Island to pick you up?

HOFFMAN: That's right. You had to have someone pick you up because in those days there were so many people [unclear] for one [unclear]. You had to have a sponsor. So she came to Ellis Island and took me, and then a man came [several words unclear]. He said, "Do you see anybody out there that you know?" And I said, "Yes, [several words unclear]." [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: Can you—can you describe Ellis Island as you saw it when you first got in?

HOFFMAN: Well, [several words unclear].

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: There must have been lots of people.

HOFFMAN: Oh, packed. Oh, Ellis Island was packed.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And people speaking all kinds of languages and—

HOFFMAN: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And did you ever see the—the girls that you shared the cabin with—

HOFFMAN: No.

LEVINE: —after that?

HOFFMAN: No.

LEVINE: No.

HOFFMAN: We used to write for awhile but never—

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And the boat—on the—on the ship that you came on, were there people from other countries or were they—

HOFFMAN: No.

LEVINE: —mainly coming from Ireland?

HOFFMAN: From Northern Ire—

LEVINE: Northern Ireland.

HOFFMAN: And [several words unclear] and Scotch. Scotch and Irish.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HOFFMAN: Those—those [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so when you—when your neighbor met you and you got into New York—

HOFFMAN: Ah.

LEVINE: —were there certain things that struck you as new and different—

HOFFMAN: Yeah, well, the first thing that struck me, we went into a cafeteria on the island and I never have seen tea bags before. And a box of tea—the box of tea [unclear] tea pot. And there was a tea bag and I didn't know what—what [unclear] did with [unclear]. [sentence unclear]. Make your tea as strong as you want.

LEVINE: And how about those first few days and weeks? Were there other things that struck you about this country?

HOFFMAN: Well, then when they went home they went on the elevator.

LEVINE: The elevated train? The subway?

HOFFMAN: Elevated—not the subway. Elevator train. It went all the way to [unclear] and that was the first time I had ever climbed up to go to the train.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: And I was [unclear] elevator train. And then, well, I went to their house [unclear] what you call a railroad.

LEVINE: What road?

HOFFMAN: What you call a railroad [unclear].

LEVINE: Oh, a railroad [unclear].

HOFFMAN: Yeah. [sentence unclear]. And he was so good to me.

LEVINE: So what happened after—after you got there? Then what?

HOFFMAN: Well, I was three days there and I says, “I have to look for a job.” [unclear], “What? You’re [unclear] a job. You have to go there— registration office [several words unclear] office.” And [unclear], “Well, I seen one down there.” “No, no. That’s for colored people.” [several words unclear] and she works in a hospital.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: I was just three days there [several words unclear].

LEVINE: You got a job there?

HOFFMAN: Three and a half days was here. [unclear] work in a hospital.

LEVINE: And what did you do?

HOFFMAN: Just help [unclear] patients.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. What hospital? Do you remember the name of it?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, Brooklyn State Hospital in Brooklyn. [laughs]

LEVINE: Wow, uh-huh. And did you stay there very long?

HOFFMAN: I stayed there four years.

LEVINE: And then what? Were you—were you still living with your [unclear] that—

HOFFMAN: Oh, no. No, I lived in the hospital.

LEVINE: Oh, you lived in the hospital?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yeah. You lived in the hospital. They had a nice room and everything.

LEVINE: Were there other young—young women like yourself—

HOFFMAN: Oh—

LEVINE: —who were living there—

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —and working there?

HOFFMAN: [unclear]

LEVINE: And what was that experience like for you in the hospital?

HOFFMAN: I liked it. But then I got homesick and I cried myself to sleep [unclear].
Oh, it was an awful feeling [unclear] homesickness.

LEVINE: Were you sorry you had come?

HOFFMAN: Well, yeah, I missed my mother and I missed my father.

LEVINE: So—so what happened then when you left the hospital?

HOFFMAN: Well, I went to work in another hospital on Long Island.

LEVINE: Another hospital—

HOFFMAN: In Long Island.

LEVINE: —in Long Island.

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And did you stay there for a long time?

HOFFMAN: I stayed there a couple years. Yeah.

LEVINE: And again, did you live in the hospital? Were you able to live there?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yeah. Yeah, lived in the hospital.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, what did you do for a social life while you were working
in this hospital?

HOFFMAN: [chuckles] I had no social life.

LEVINE: Did you—did you have friends who were also working there?

HOFFMAN: [unclear] on the first morning I [unclear] I bought a Victrola. I bought a [several words unclear]. And I bought a Victrola and bought [unclear] records and played them. And they used to come to my room to hear them.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. And did—were there any particular songs that were—

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —popular in this country that you remember?

HOFFMAN: Oh, “Who’s Sorry Now” and [several words unclear]. [several words unclear] the Old Country down [several words unclear] and “The Old [unclear].”

LEVINE: “The Old”—

HOFFMAN: “The Old [several words unclear].”

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So the girls would come to your room and you’d play these records.

HOFFMAN: Yeah, I’d play the records for them.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And let’s see. So—so then you worked in the Long Island Hospital—

HOFFMAN: Yeah, for a couple of years.

LEVINE: —for a couple of years. And then what?

HOFFMAN: I came back—

LEVINE: To Ireland?

HOFFMAN: No.

LEVINE: No.

HOFFMAN: I came back to the hospital [several words unclear]

LEVINE: Oh, and how did you meet your husband?

HOFFMAN: [several words unclear] the hospital [unclear].

LEVINE: He—he was in the hospital?

HOFFMAN: No. He lived about—he lived—

LEVINE: Oh, he lived around the hospital?

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember how you met?

HOFFMAN: [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what was his name?

HOFFMAN: His name were Michael.

LEVINE: Michael. And when did you start to feel less homesick and more like you wanted to stay in this country?

HOFFMAN: Well, [several words unclear]. "I'll be back in five years and we'll build a hotel across the street." [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: So did you—did you—was there a time when you started to feel better about being here?

HOFFMAN: Oh—and then I went home and I got my citizen papers in '29, came in '23, got them in '29 and went home [unclear] for three months.

LEVINE: Ah. What—was that a big day for you when you got your citizenship papers?

HOFFMAN: Well, they gave everybody their—

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember anything about it?

HOFFMAN: No. [unclear] remember they—a doctor was called on. That was it. We were [unclear] to [several words unclear]. Quite a crowd was in the courtroom.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: Well, I remember them calling [unclear].

LEVINE: Were you married by the time you became a citizen?

HOFFMAN: [unclear]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how about your husband? Was he from Ireland as well?

HOFFMAN: Oh, no.

LEVINE: No.

HOFFMAN: He never saw Ireland.

LEVINE: Oh, he never saw—so after you became a citizen, you decided to return for a visit.

HOFFMAN: While I was waiting for my citizen papers to go—to [unclear].

LEVINE: And what was it like when you got back to Ireland?

HOFFMAN: Well, they have a—a—a newspaperman interviewed me.

LEVINE: I'm sorry. Could you say it again?

HOFFMAN: A newspaperman—

LEVINE: A newspaperman.

HOFFMAN: —interviewed me.

LEVINE: Oh.

HOFFMAN: "How do you like America?"

LEVINE: Do you remember what you said?

HOFFMAN: Oh. Half the things I didn't say at all they put in the paper.

LEVINE: Oh. [chuckles] So what—how did Ireland seem to you after being in America for six years?

HOFFMAN: Well, I was [several words unclear] everything looked too small.

LEVINE: Looked small, uh-huh. And—and did you think you might want to go back to Ireland at that time?

HOFFMAN: No, no. [unclear].

LEVINE: No.

HOFFMAN: [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you stayed for three months.

HOFFMAN: Stayed three months, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then when you went back again in 1929, what ship did you go back again on?

HOFFMAN: On—on the same company.

LEVINE: The Cunard Line?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, Cu—but a different ship.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And you were a citizen so you didn't have to go to Ellis Island.

HOFFMAN: Oh, no.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And where were you living then? Where were you living in this country?

HOFFMAN: I lived in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: In Brooklyn? Uh-huh. So did you stay living in Brooklyn then?

HOFFMAN: I stayed there.

LEVINE: You stayed there. And did you raise a family there?

HOFFMAN: No, I never had any children.

LEVINE: You didn't have children.

HOFFMAN: [several words unclear] working for Chase National Bank and met a girl there and she was telling me about the ships. I always wanted to be a stewardess and she was telling me about the ships. And her sister was working on a luxury liner, and I went and applied and I got a job there. So I [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So what would you do? You would take—you would be a stewardess when the ship left?

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Where—where were the ships going? The ones that you were working on?

HOFFMAN: Well, I worked on the—on the ships going from New York to San Francisco through the Panama Canal. [several words unclear] and eventually closed the [several words unclear] Panama Canal up [unclear] to San Francisco. It was six weeks when you left New York and came back.

LEVINE: Six weeks from New York to get—and back to New York. Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: Six weeks and three days.

LEVINE: And—and did—you enjoyed that?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, I liked that.

LEVINE: What did you like about it?

HOFFMAN: Well, I just liked everything.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: I loved it.

LEVINE: Did you—did you go other places too or just to—

HOFFMAN: Oh, well, later years—that was after the war. In later years, I started going to Europe [several words unclear] come back [several words unclear] happening [unclear] Germany, [several words unclear]. And then in the wintertime the [several words unclear]. I was on the [unclear] for four years and [several words unclear] U.S.S. United States [unclear] from—she made her maiden voyage until she tied up. So those new—new ships now, you know—they're all foreign ships. They're [several words unclear] overnight. Well, it would take you five days.

LEVINE: Now, when you came back from a trip, would you—would you stay in New York for awhile?

HOFFMAN: Two days.

LEVINE: And then you'd be off again on another one?

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, did your husband work on the ships too?

HOFFMAN: No.

LEVINE: No. So—so what—did the Depression affect you personally in anyway?

HOFFMAN: I never knew [unclear]. Thank God.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: But I used to write letters for people that needed help. [unclear] to the captain of the [unclear]. I'm a Republican but I would write to the Democrats [unclear] captains for help [unclear] different people. And [unclear] became a Republican. The day that I got my citizen papers I [unclear] went to this little store [several words unclear]. On this day I went in. There was a man there [unclear] well dressed, bow tie. And the man owns the store. [unclear] citizen. And the man [unclear]? He just stood there when they asked [unclear] questions, who [unclear] government in this country? Who [several words unclear]? And different things. [unclear] no, I didn't. I just read the papers, the newspapers. People used take classes go—take classes to go [unclear]. I said, "No, I just—I just took the test." He said, "Well, what—what [several words unclear]?" I said, "[unclear]. I don't know [unclear] to tell you the truth. I have to read [several words unclear]." [sentence unclear]. I said, "I don't know. I'll have to read it." And he said, "Well, I'll tell you what. Would you like to work on the Republican Election Committee?" And I said—and he said an inspection at the polls is \$40 for the day. And I said, "Why, sure." [several words unclear] pass the exam, [several words unclear]. [sentence unclear]. But I'm [unclear]. My father [unclear]. He said, "Now that your [several words unclear]." And I said, "Republican." "What? They're not for working people." [chuckles] He knew more about the [unclear] than I did. [several words unclear] a job [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember anything that happened in politics during your time in this country that particularly affected you?

HOFFMAN: Well, I'll tell you. Al Smith was governor of New York. He was on the [several words unclear]. And [unclear] I can vote for him. [unclear], "You can't. You're registered Republican."

LEVINE: So—so you—so you couldn't vote for him?

HOFFMAN: Well, [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How about the Second World War? When that started you were in this country, and how did that affect you personally?

HOFFMAN: Well, there was nobody going back and forth. And there was nobody allowed to work on the ships. Remember, [several words unclear] during the war.

LEVINE: Did you—did you do anything else in—in the war effort? Did you work in a factory or—

HOFFMAN: Yeah, I worked in the Waldorf Astoria. I was secretary to a volunteer there [unclear] Waldorf Astoria Towers. That's the—well, that's the whole [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HOFFMAN: But the Towers is a part—it's above the 42nd—[unclear] 42nd floor. [several words unclear] good people stay there. Well, I was secretary to the manager there [unclear] there all the time during the war. [several words unclear] '47 till after the war was over.

LEVINE: Right.

HOFFMAN: So I went back on the ship.

LEVINE: You went back on the ship? Uh-hmm. And how long did you stay working on the ship?

HOFFMAN: I stayed there until I retired in '96—oh, not '96—

LEVINE: Not '96.

HOFFMAN: '66.

LEVINE: '66, uh-huh. Uh-huh. When you look back on it—when you look back on coming here as a young woman—

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —do you think that made a big difference?

HOFFMAN: I think so.

LEVINE: How—how did—how did it—how did it manifest itself? How did coming here, immigrating here make a difference in the kind of person you are or—

HOFFMAN: [unclear].

LEVINE: —how you see things?

HOFFMAN: [several words unclear]. I don't think so.

LEVINE: Do you think you—do you think you were a brave—to—

HOFFMAN: I—I think [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: Coming [several words unclear]. And probably it's just as well you don't.

LEVINE: Right. [laughs] Uh-huh. But it seems to have worked out for you.

HOFFMAN: [unclear] miracle.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HOFFMAN: [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: Now, how do you think of yourself, as far as being Irish and being American? How do you balance those two kinds of aspects of yourself?

HOFFMAN: Well, I've lived longer here. I've lived longer in this country—73 years, I think. I was [several words unclear] here.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. When—when you lived in Northern Ireland, was there—was there conflict between the Catholics and Protestants at that time?

HOFFMAN: Oh, awful. Awful.

LEVINE: Awful? Can you say anything that you remember about that?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, I remember—I remember [[several words unclear] office.

LEVINE: Let me take that because it'll break it up

HOFFMAN: And come for a job in an office and he says to me, "What school did you go to?" And I said, "The [unclear] Convent School." [sentence unclear]. Yeah. So I never went for a job again.

LEVINE: Is there anything else that you remember about that?

HOFFMAN: Well, I remember a curfew at night. There was—[unclear] were [unclear] and they had the curfew. Nobody could be [unclear] after nine at night. It was the summertime. Your doors had to be closed, nobody on the street. Oh, yeah. [sentence unclear]. It was always bad up there. See, [several words unclear] neighborhood. [several words unclear] so you got no mixture. See, here everybody's equal because [unclear]. Well, you go to school here and your—you see the—well, there you had your own schools. You had your own churches. You had your own neighborhood. [several words unclear] gets together so it's really—it's really not the people's fault [unclear]. It's the way they were brought up.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. How about in this country? Were a lot of your friends also people who came from Ireland?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, but there wasn't any came from the north of Ireland. They mostly came from the south or west. They used to go to Canada from my—from my town.

LEVINE: From north—from Londonderry?

HOFFMAN: Australia and Canada [several words unclear] to America.

LEVINE: Oh.

HOFFMAN: From our town; I know that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you know why—did you ever think of going to Australia or Canada?

HOFFMAN: Oh, I [unclear]. People talked about Australia. No. No, I just—next door was a Mr. Glent. And he had two big pictures in the kitchen of "Go to New York" Big. And I used to gaze at those pic—[unclear]. [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: How did you feel when John Kennedy became president? Do you remember that?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, [several words unclear]. He was [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Oh, that's right. So—

HOFFMAN: He was handsome. Handsome.

LEVINE: Yes, he was.

HOFFMAN: Oh! And now she's dead too. Old people [several words unclear] still living [several words unclear]. [several sentences unclear].

LEVINE: Have you had any heroes in your life? People that you really looked up to?

HOFFMAN: [unclear].

LEVINE: Whether they were famous and well known or particularly personal, you know, connections you had with people?

HOFFMAN: Well, I suppose I have [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Are there—is there anything that—any kinds of activities that you've done in your life that you were particularly fond of doing?

HOFFMAN: [several words unclear], although I read the sport paper a lot. I—

LEVINE: Is there anything that you—when you look back on it, you—makes you feel particularly satisfied, that you feel proud of or satisfied about that you—you've done?

HOFFMAN: I just can't believe everybody's dead and gone.

LEVINE: That's true. You've outlived probably—

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —a lot of people you know.

HOFFMAN: I just can't believe it. [unclear] time's getting short. [banging noise] That dog.

LEVINE: Yeah, and how is this time in your life? In your old age?

HOFFMAN: Well, it's [unclear] short. Time's [unclear] short. I usually read the death notices—

LEVINE: Well, your—

HOFFMAN: —which I never did before. [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: Well, your—your mind is certainly sharp.

HOFFMAN: [chuckles] Oh, Well, thank God [several words unclear]. [unclear] strong, able-bodied people who have no mind. That is very sad. [sentence unclear]. Very sad.

LEVINE: And you—and you have all your animals for—for friends and company, I guess. Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: That's my niece's dog, a big dog.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: He's a lovely dog. [chuckles] Go away, now. She doesn't need your help.

LEVINE: Well, let's see. Is there anything else you can think of that has to do with—with your years in Ireland or coming here and living out the most of your life here? Is there anything else that comes to mind that you remember?

HOFFMAN: Well, the only thing I remember is when my father was dying. I was in the Waldorf and [several words unclear] to stay, for my sisters saying that he was pretty bad, dying of cancer of the stomach. So tears came to my eyes and [unclear] the man and his wife used to visit me and he was [several words unclear]. [several sentences unclear]. My father's dying. And he says, "Oh, [several words unclear]. Why don't you call [several words unclear] a long line of waiting." So there wasn't [several words unclear] after the [unclear]. And he said, "[several words unclear]." [several sentences unclear]. [several words unclear] \$791. There was only catch. I had to go to Sharon [PH] and then I took the train from Sharon. I took the train from Sharon up to my town [unclear]. And my mother [several words unclear]. He didn't die for a month after I came back. I only got my vacation [unclear] after 10 days. And that's all I could stay with him, 10 days. And then I came back and he died a month later. [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: Do you remember any attitudes of your father? Any ways that he thought about life or things he tried to teach you and instill in you?

HOFFMAN: Oh, he was—he was way ahead of his time.

LEVINE: Oh, how—how so?

HOFFMAN: He was way—

LEVINE: In what ways was he ahead of his time?

HOFFMAN: Well, he just knew about everything was going to happen after the war was over. He had read all those things. He [unclear] a wonderful man. God bless him. I miss him awful because he used to write to me every week.

LEVINE: He used to write to you every week?

HOFFMAN: [unclear]

LEVINE: What would he write about?

HOFFMAN: [unclear]. Just little news and things. And [unclear] died [unclear] got sick. And he had his mind up to the very end, even with cancer of the stomach.

LEVINE: And how about your mother? Were there any attitudes that she had that she tried to instill in you?

HOFFMAN: Well, [several words unclear]. [several sentences unclear].

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A]

LEVINE: Okay, this is now tape two of Frances Hoffman. You were saying in 1916—

HOFFMAN: Yeah, the [unclear] Rebellion. Now, [several words unclear] Rebellion. Our neighbor was [several words unclear], two schoolteachers and [several words unclear]. And two of our neighbors sent—well, he was sent to Wakefield [PH] and they knew the [unclear]. He was sent after six weeks.

LEVINE: And he—and what was the purpose of his being sent there?

HOFFMAN: Well, [unclear] of that—for being in IRA. Although they weren't for terrors, like now. They were for [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you remember anything about the role he played with the IRA, what he did?

HOFFMAN: Well, [unclear], we were in school. I was 14.

LEVINE: What—what was your father's attitude about—about the IRA and what he wanted?

HOFFMAN: Well, you see, the IRA today's a bunch of terrorists, not like in those days where there were [unclear]. They were [several words unclear].

LEVINE: So his attitude was to negotiate? Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: They [several words unclear].

LEVINE: And did they want to be a part of the rest of Ireland?

HOFFMAN: Well, I think they wanted freedom. They wanted away from—

LEVINE: Away from the British?

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, your niece mentioned that you—you knew the Kennedys.

HOFFMAN: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: How did you happen to know them?

HOFFMAN: Well, on the ship. Yeah, all the sisters were [unclear] there.

LEVINE: The sisters?

HOFFMAN: I loved the father. I knew him from the Waldorf.

LEVINE: Oh, you knew him from the Waldorf.

HOFFMAN: The father.

LEVINE: And why did you love the father?

HOFFMAN: Because he was so generous and so good. I didn't [unclear] at all. [sentence unclear]. But I liked very much.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you have—can you recall any personal interaction you had with—

HOFFMAN: Yeah, well, Mr. Kennedy, every time he saw me, give me \$5 to buy a box of candy. That's what I remember about him. [laughter]

LEVINE: Yeah? And did you know any other famous people from the Waldorf?

HOFFMAN: Well, all the movie actors. And then they had all the different heads of states always stayed there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: And the [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Were you a real moviegoer? Did you go to the movies much? No?

HOFFMAN: No. When I came over here I used to go to the [unclear]. One movie house to another. I loved the movies. [several words unclear] stay a week, a whole week before they changed them.

LEVINE: Can you remember any of those movies that you particularly liked?

HOFFMAN: No.

LEVINE: No. How about movie stars? Did you have any that were your favorites?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, the old-timers.

LEVINE: Which old-timers were they?

HOFFMAN: Well, Gloria Swanson. She was—

LEVINE: Gloria Swanson.

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: Yeah, [several words unclear] the ones in the silent movies.

LEVINE: The silent movies.

HOFFMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Did they always have a piano player when you would go to the silent ones?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yeah. Always. Always had one.

LEVINE: Did you continue to play the piano yourself?

HOFFMAN: No. I had no piano [unclear]. [unclear]. I'll never forget. I was [unclear]. I kept telling my sister, [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOFFMAN: A person changes.

LEVINE: Now, you never stayed overnight at Ellis Island.

HOFFMAN: Oh, no.

LEVINE: You stayed on the ship before—

HOFFMAN: No.

LEVINE: —you got to—

HOFFMAN: Yeah, [several words unclear]. I remember it was Friday morning and the [several words unclear] and the doctors. Oh, they had women doctors. They [several words unclear] examinations they give you.

LEVINE: Was that embarrassing?

HOFFMAN: No, I said it was a—it was a woman doctor, see. She [several words unclear]. [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: Okay. Well, how about—is there anything else that comes to mind, now that we're talking about all of this?

HOFFMAN: Oh, just thank God I lived [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Yeah? And you still haven't said what you—what you feel proud of.

HOFFMAN: [chuckles]

LEVINE: I'm sure there are lots of things you could feel proud of. Well, how do you feel about those years when you were the executive secretary at the Waldorf?

HOFFMAN: Well, the manager's secretary [unclear].

LEVINE: Manager's secretary.

HOFFMAN: [unclear] important people.

LEVINE: When you're here—when you're here during the day, do you think about that—those times—

HOFFMAN: Oh—

LEVINE: —and what it was like?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Yeah. And how does it seem, now that you look back on it all?

HOFFMAN: Well, I've come a long way.

LEVINE: Yes. [laughs] You sure have. Okay, I think that's a perfect place to end. I want to thank you so much.

HOFFMAN: [unclear].

LEVINE: It was so interesting.

HOFFMAN: Oh.

LEVINE: And now your story will be at Ellis Island.

HOFFMAN: Oh.

LEVINE: And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]