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CATHERINE HANNON ENGLISH

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RESIDENCES

- **IRELAND: LOUGHKIERAN**
- **US: NYC**

SIGRIST: Good Morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, September 19, 1991. We're here in Queens with Catherine English, who came from Ireland in 1924 when she was 24 years old. Good morning. Mrs. English, can you please give me your full name with your maiden name, please.

ENGLISH: My maiden name was Catherine Hannon.

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SIGRIST: Spell that please.

ENGLISH: H-A-N-N-O-N.

SIGRIST: H-A-N-N-O-N and what was your date of birth, please?

ENGLISH: My date of birth was February 15th. I guess it was 1900, yes.

SIGRIST: I see and where were you born?

ENGLISH: was born in a place called Loughkieran, L-O-U-G-H-K-I-E-R-A-N. That was the village and that was Mayo, County Mayo, Ireland.

SIGRIST: That's M-A-Y-O, Mayo?

ENGLISH: Yes.

SIGRIST: Where in Ireland is that exactly? Which part of Ireland is that in?

ENGLISH: That's the west, the west of Ireland.

SIGRIST: see. Can you talk a little bit about the town? What did it look like?

ENGLISH: Well, the town, the nearest town to it was Ballyvary, B-A-L-L-Y-V-A-R-Y, and the town was all to one side. There was no house this side or that but all to one side and they used to christen it "Ballyvary", The Town to One Side. (She laughs)

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SIGRIST: What kinds of houses were these? Were they big houses, small houses?

ENGLISH: Oh yes, I would say like a four room house. There was nine in my family. I was the youngest and I had one of my sisters that was older than me died at about age seventeen. She had epileptics and my other sisters came out here.

SIGRIST: I see.

ENGLISH: There were three, here. My brother was a tailor and one of my brothers and he was a deaf and dumb mute but he got along very wonderful. He opened his own little business and had a nice clientele. And then my mother, she raised a child from two weeks old and in 1916 he was born. And after my mother passed away in 1928, she told us that we should never forsake the child and that we should no matter what, where we go, that we should take him. She was very, very fond of him and we took him...

SIGRIST: Whose child was this? Was this her? The last child, was this child her's?

ENGLISH: No, no, no. It was her brother's child. The child's mother died and my mother raised him.

SIGRIST: I see. What was your mother's name?

ENGLISH: My mother's name was Bridget McEvey, M-C-E-V-E-Y, McEvey.

SIGRIST: Was she was from this town?

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ENGLISH: No, no. She was, you might hear of it, she was from a village called Bohola where Mayor O'Dwyer came from. (She laughs)

SIGRIST: Can you spell that please?

ENGLISH: The town?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

ENGLISH: B-O-H-O-L-A.

SIGRIST: So how did she, was your father from this town?

ENGLISH: My father was, had the home where she was. My father married her and then they lived until both of them died in the place called Loughkieran.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

ENGLISH: My father's name was John.

SIGRIST: And talk a little bit about your father.

ENGLISH: John. I don't remember him.

SIGRIST: Why?

ENGLISH: Because I was so young when he died.

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SIGRIST: Oh, how old were you when he died?

ENGLISH: I think I must be four or five. I imagine I knew him listening from my mother talk about him but I really didn't.

SIGRIST: What did he die of?

ENGLISH: He died of pneumonia and left my mother with nine of us.

SIGRIST: Now you say you were the youngest. How old was the oldest? What kind of span was there?

ENGLISH: She could be about maybe nineteen or twenty. Maybe more I don't...

SIGRIST: Nineteen or twenty years between you?

ENGLISH: Oh yes. Well, of course, there was ones in between. The oldest would be about twenty, twenty-two. And then my mother, the oldest girl came out here to some friends, relations, because my mother had to do something about us (unintelligible) but she came out here and she did very well. She was a baby nurse. Took care of rich children and baby on Park Avenue. I don't know who with or anything. Then, when she got on her feet a bit, she sent for my second sister. My second oldest sister as Mary and she came out here.

SIGRIST: What year?

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ENGLISH: You could say 1921 and then my second sister might come in 1922 or maybe 23, see those things...

SIGRIST: Right before you came?

ENGLISH: Oh yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Talk about being a little girl growing up in a house without a father in this huge family. What was that like?

ENGLISH: Well, I don't know. See, in Ireland you know the whole neighborhood. And the teachers in the schools were very kind to us. They used to give us books free and all that. And we joined in little plays and we had, I must say, I had a nice childhood even though, but you see if I think I remembered my father it would be very sad but I didn't remember him and everybody was very kind, too. I had wonderful uncles and aunts and they kept us in clothes and shoes and one thing or another and took us to my grandmother during the summer months and we spent, three of us especially, the three youngest, and we had a great time. My uncles were really kind to us.

SIGRIST: Good. Let's talk about your grandmother and what you did in summer. Did she have a house out in the countryside there?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We were all in the country, you now.

SIGRIST: Whose mother was she? Was she your father's mother?

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ENGLISH: She was my mother's mother.

SIGRIST: What was she like as a person?

ENGLISH: Oh, she spoke Gaelic and she spoke English but from her we learned our Gaelic. She spoke always in Gaelic. Not that we could answer back but we knew what she was saying. I don't know why but we knew what she was saying. She was very, very kind to us and that we loved going there.

SIGRIST: What did she look like?

ENGLISH: Well, at the time that I knew her she had a lot of rheumatism and she sat by the fireplace all day long and she had her sons medicated for her with down feathers and all that because they had geese and they had duck and all that they saved. They made all kinds of pillows for her but she still never complained, that I remember, to us. She had no complaints at all.

SIGRIST: How long would you stay with her?

ENGLISH: Well, during the summer months and the school months we only got just about six weeks and maybe five weeks or something like that.

SIGRIST: And was it kind of a relief for your mother in a way to have you...?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes. Oh yes. Because then there was three mouths she didn't have to feed, yeah.

SIGRIST: How did she support you?

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ENGLISH: Well, you see we had a farm and we had sold wheat on the farm. We had potatoes and everything you could think of. The only thing, then the wheat she had, the men of the village as I told you was always very good. They came and they threshed the wheat for us and there was no threshing machine. I don't know if you know what a flail was like. And they got all the wheat out of the corns or whatever you call them and that was sent to the mill. And being they knew my mother, she got quite a break in the making flour out of it. When it was all ready, she got bags and bags of wheat flour and she used to make all the bread. And then we had cows that give milk and, as far as I know, anything to eat we didn't suffer because we had chickens and we had, my mother had chickens different months or something like that and see she killed the chickens for this month and we kept young pigs. We'd send the young pigs to the bacon factory. That I remember so well, to the bacon factory to have them killed and preserved and send it home. Sent it to us in a big barrel of brine. And then we had eats for the whole year.

SIGRIST: It sounds like the town really watched out for you.

ENGLISH: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Why do you suppose that was? Was your father very much loved in that town?

ENGLISH: My father was what they called a water bailiff, too.

SIGRIST: Water bailiff?

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ENGLISH: Bailiff, yeah. He took care of the river near us and he took care of that river that, like, for instance, you couldn't come and fish without a license and without letting him know. And then in the fall, would be around October I think, the salmon started coming and under no condition you should kill the salmon. And he had all that to look at but he got a little pay maybe for a very little, I guess, very little.

SIGRIST: But at least he got to know everybody in the town.

ENGLISH: Oh yes, that's what I say. He knew the police because once in a while the police would come around and find out if anyone was fishing and they got a nice fine if they did that. I don't know anything about what fine was...

SIGRIST: What chores were yours specifically?

ENGLISH: Oh, my chores. We had, as I told you, we had geese and we had ducks and everything. There was a lake nearby and after we came from school we had to go out and try to coax the geese in off the lake and coax the ducks in and put them away for the night. And then we had, before we went to school, we had to go out and collect the eggs. So see, we didn't suffer. If anything, we had plenty of duck eggs, chicken eggs. And the goose eggs, they never did anything because they put them to hatch. They had geese, then. My mother used to sell the geese and turkeys. They got a nice price for them. What it 'tis I don't know.

SIGRIST: Would you say that you lived, were you poor or were you more comfortable?

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ENGLISH: Ah, as far as eats we were comfortable but naturally enough we were poor.
(She laughs)

SIGRIST: What did you eat? What kind of foods did your mother make? Did your mother do the cooking?

ENGLISH: My mother, as I told you, we had, oh boy (referring to the rain outside), my mother, as I told you, had chickens. We had plenty of meat. The young pigs we had went to the factory to be killed and that would come home, so you never had to buy anything. We didn't have to buy eggs or butter or anything in the line of food.

SIGRIST: Was there something your mother used to make that you really liked that you remember? A certain type of food?

ENGLISH: Oh yes, she used, turkey, I never tasted turkey like she used to make.

SIGRIST: How did she cook it?

ENGLISH: Well, you see, dear, we had open fires. You never had anything in. You had stands; on stands. And you brought the fire out and that. She put them into this, oh pot, and put a few sticks in the pot. She used have like lattice work and put, I forgot what it was, but that used to be made out of sally rods.

SIGRIST: Sally rods?

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ENGLISH: Yes, sally was a tree. I can't remember any tree, well it was made out of the tree, anyway.

SIGRIST: So this, this rack underneath was wooden?

ENGLISH: Yes, yes, yes and the flavor from that tree, they were willow trees, and the flavor from that tree seems went right through the turkey. Then she had, as I told you, we had plenty of bread. She stuffed the turkey and everything and as I told you, I don't think anything ever tasted like it.

SIGRIST: I see.

ENGLISH: It was really wonderful.

SIGRIST: Do you know because you had brothers and sisters who were quite a bit older than you...

ENGLISH: Older, yes.

SIGRIST: Did they have jobs outside the home?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes. They, they, well I don't know, maybe you heard of it, the peat that we burned in the fire.

SIGRIST: Yes, peat.

ENGLISH: My brother would go on, he'd get paid for those. Paid for small jobs like the saving of the peat and bringing home, my mother, maybe it was five miles

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where the bog was.

SIGRIST: And he would, he would take the peat out?

ENGLISH: Yes and he'd help, yes, and then bring home. And my uncles lived near a dry, told you I had uncles and aunts and all that, they lived near a bog and whatever the turf that we, used to call it "turf" but it's peat, wherever, I mean dug the peat; dug by with slains. They saved it for us and they used to give us what turf and we had plenty. Then we used to get another bog where they got turf. So with that, that was no problem.

SIGRIST: The peat is very important to the Irish. I know at Ellis Island, in our collection, we have pieces of peat that...

ENGLISH: Peat, yes, yes, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Were brought by Irish people.

ENGLISH: They still have it but now it's all done by machinery.

SIGRIST: Yes, that's right.

ENGLISH: Yes.

SIGRIST: Lets talk a little bit about school.

ENGLISH: Oh.

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SIGRIST: Describe the school building to me.

ENGLISH: School, we went what they called the National School. And it was in the village and we came home for lunch and things like that. And the teachers, there was four teachers. There was the mother and father and the two girls taught school there. And they, of course, the father and mother was quite old fashioned. They never had any, like different things for us to make or do anything.

SIGRIST: So what kinds of things did you learn? What...

ENGLISH: Well, I learned how to make my own uniform and everyone that could sew or do anything. It was just blue and it had a piece around the neck and one going down there (she gestures), and they would help. They would show us how to cut it and then they would go along. And done all by hand, no machine. So it was done all by hand and many other things. Making dolls and things.

SIGRIST: Was this a girl's school?

ENGLISH: Huh?

SIGRIST: Was this just for girls, this school?

ENGLISH: No, it was for girls. Oh yes, it was enlarged for one door went the boys and one for the girls. It was, but twas all done. But then for different subjects the boys would come into the girl's school, whatever we were taking and that. They were very marvelous teachers. I went to see them each time I went

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back but now they're both gone.

SIGRIST: Did you like school?

ENGLISH: Oh yes, yes I did, very much.

SIGRIST: Was your mother very supportive of getting an education?

ENGLISH: Oh yes, oh my God she would, if you said you had a toothache, she'd make sure you didn't have a toothache. She'd march you off hail, rain or shine. Of course, as I said, the school was in the village. Yes, oh yes that was their motto, that no matter where you go, you have to have an education.

SIGRIST: Did your mother, could your mother read and write and so after she...?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: So she was educated herself?

ENGLISH: Oh yes, yes, yes as a matter, she was. It wasn't, I don't think, a monitor but she used to help out when she was going to school with the young children you know, maybe. I don't think she got any appointment or anything like that, no, but that was that. But then as each one of us got into different classes. Then when I became about 17, I guess, 16 or 17, I was sent away to a boarding school.

SIGRIST: Oh? Tell me about, did you want to go?

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ENGLISH: Oh yes, you had to. (she laughs) Wasn't that you liked to but you had to, to finish because my mother, as I told you was, she said no matter where you go, you had to have an education. And then the boarding school was about 30 miles away.

SIGRIST: How did you get there?

ENGLISH: Oh, we had a horse and car that time; a sidecar. I don't know if you know what it's like.

SIGRIST: Just a small carriage of some sort or...

ENGLISH: Yes, yes, yes and my brother drove us there, yeah.

SIGRIST: So how often did you get back to the family?

ENGLISH: Holidays like Christmas and Easter that...

SIGRIST: Talk, talk about Christmas to me. What was ...

ENGLISH: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Talk about what you did at Christmas time.

ENGLISH: Well we, as I said we got coming from school got, getting out of school you got little gifts and marks, if you got good marks you got another kind of gift but sometimes it was only dolls or something like that and as long as we got good marks that to me was the main thing.

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SIGRIST: Now did you go to church with your family or ...?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Lets talk a little bit about your religious life.

ENGLISH: Oh, my mother...

SIGRIST: Were you Catholic?

ENGLISH: Of course raised Catholics. And my mother was very strict about us getting up in the morning and going. The church wasn't too far away. We got bicycles. We could go, it was all down hill almost to the church. And then in the church, after the services were over, we had to stay on. All the young folks had to stay on and one of the priests would come out and question us on religion and things what we knew and things like that, which we hated.
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: Can you describe the church for me? What was it's name?

ENGLISH: The church was a new church. Very nicely. It was in the place called Strade. It was put up by donations and by the parishioners. And then I, one aunt and she donated a lot of stuff for the church and things and in the memory of my father because he, he was her brother and, of course, that was a must. We had to. And...

SIGRIST: Was there a plaque in the church that said such and such is dedicated to

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your father? Was there some sort of a memorial plaque in the church?

ENGLISH: Well, that was what it was . It was nothing that he did extra for the church and he couldn't because he had to work in order to support us, I guess. But it was just a, but it wasn't a big church.

SIGRIST: see.

ENGLISH: But it was enough to hold a village, a couple of villages, the people that went there, yeah.

SIGRIST: Was everyone Catholic...

ENGLISH: Oh, yes...

SIGRIST: In the town?

English: Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes. There was just one family that didn't but that family was very good, I, they were English and they used to come to Ireland. They had their home there. They'd come to Ireland every summer but they were very good. Whatever was they had, they had a man working there. If they had potatoes or vegetables or anything they gave them over to whoever wants to take them.

SIGRIST: What religion were they?

ENGLISH: They weren't Catholic.

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SIGRIST: They weren't Catholic, something else?

ENGLISH: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, let's talk a little bit about, what did you know about America?

ENGLISH: Well, what I knew about America is what my sisters would write. And, (to Janet Levine) if you want to close the window you...

JANET LEVINE (in attendance): No, it feels wonderful.

ENGLISH: No, yeah. And my sister, I think it was my second sister, used to send us little notes about what the children do here and everything. And she used to send us ribbons for our hair and little things like that, you know.

SIGRIST: When she came to America did she get a job?

ENGLISH: Yes, with a very rich family I believe in, what wasi t...

SIGRIST: Being a nursemaid, you told me, you said...

ENGLISH: Yeah, something like that and it was with Morgan's daughter, J. P. Morgan's daughter and she was a Mrs. Nichols. And she, oh, she was with them a long, long time and then I think times got very bad, I really don't know but she had hair that she could, oh that she could sit on. Her hair was so long. So Stern's in 42nd Street, it's gone now, asked her if she wouldn't demonstrate her hair and then they gave her some kind of a salve. (she laughs) She said she never used it but the people used to think this salve,

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that's why she had the hair and she had it for years.

SIGRIST: So she could have made extra money doing this?

ENGLISH: Yes, yes, well she stayed with that, with then she did very well, I believe, but then when I came here...

SIGRIST: So she's writing to you...

ENGLISH: Yes.

SIGRIST: Telling you what's going on.

ENGLISH: Yes, yes, what she did and her job...

SIGRIST: What made you want to come to America?

ENGLISH: Well, you see my, I had three sisters here and one of them, the most thing really was , one of them was in training to be a R.N. at Flower Hospital. And she thought that would be nice if I come and go training because I came out of school then. And I came with the understanding that I would become a nurse. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Had you any inclination to do that when you were in Ireland?

ENGLISH: Oh no, I... No, you done what you were told. (she laughs) Very obedient, too.

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SIGRIST: Had you had any jobs before you came here in Ireland when you got out of school?

ENGLISH: Yes, there was a couple of old women, the one was a caretaker for a big estate and she did, she didn't have very much food or anything and we'd go to the store for her and buy her bread and then my mother had plenty of milk, she'd send the milk to her and she send some butter to her and she kept the old lady. She was about a mile down the road from us. As soon as we came from school, I had to go and help. We called her "Aunty" and up to this day I don't even know her name. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: So you got paid a little bit for doing?

ENGLISH: Oh, you got two pennies, maybe.

SIGRIST: Something like that.

ENGLISH: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So, so your sisters are writing to you and how did you feel about the idea of coming to America?

ENGLISH: Oh, I wanted to come to join them because it seemed that coming out of school I, I wanted to do it. I don't know why but I did want to come. And I came.

SIGRIST: Did your sisters send money for you, for your passage?

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ENGLISH: Oh yes, they sent me the passage. Oh yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much it cost?

ENGLISH: I really don't know.

SIGRIST: So when, when did you actually leave from your town?

ENGLISH: I'm not sure it was, was it, I think I came in November. I know I was here for Christmas.

SIGRIST: Talk about saying good-bye to your family.

ENGLISH: Well, I only had really my mother and my brother and this kid my mother raised. And I had a sister and she was away taking up dressmaking in one of the towns. And my mother, all I thought is, "Oh, if I make money I'll come back next year," but I didn't make that kind of money. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: So that was your intention then, really just go for a little while and come back.

ENGLISH: Yeah, well I, I wanted to see my mother because everything was my mother no matter, all of us the same...

SIGRIST: She was very important to your lives.

ENGLISH: Yes, yes, yes and all my sisters here, with the exception of my sister that was in training, she got nothing the first years. The first two years she got

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nothing.

SIGRIST: When was she here?

ENGLISH: Yes, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you packed? What did you take with you?

ENGLISH: Oh, they, my sisters told me not to take only one dress and all that and that they would supply me with clothes when I come here. So, but I did get a new coat and oh, I thought that was out of this world.

SIGRIST: Describe the coat for me.

ENGLISH: The coat had, had a hood on it. And that you know if you brought up, there was a little bit of fur around the hood and of course, in order to see the fur, oh I kept it on me all the time and it was brown. It was funny, only the other night I was thinking of that. And I said I wonder... So my mother asked me then, when I got clothes here, to send the coat back.

SIGRIST: Oh.

ENGLISH: That she had someone to give it to and that's what happened to the coat.

SIGRIST: But at least you went to America with the coat.

ENGLISH: Yes, I was all dressed up coming here.

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SIGRIST: So now where did you leave from?

ENGLISH: I, you mean by train?

SIGRIST: Did you take the train coming...

ENGLISH: The train, I took a train to Dublin and...

SIGRIST: This is the first time you've ever been on a train?

ENGLISH: Oh no, no. I had, any ills you had to go a distance, the next two stops, to go to a doctor but then you got special, special rates if my mother took us with children or anything. You got special rates.

SIGRIST: Did any of your family members go with you to Dublin?

ENGLISH: Yes, my brother did. My brother did come with me and e, I said I thought he was going to come to Queenstown with me but no, he couldn't because he had this little job and he wanted to go back to it. But I didn't go to, he didn't go to Queenstown with me. He came just from Dublin...

(End of side A)

(start of side B)

SIGRIST: How long did you stay in Dublin?

ENGLISH: About two days. I had exams there and different things.

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SIGRIST: What kind of exams?

ENGLISH: Oh, my heart and my lungs and think that, I think when I came here, when they saw that those peoples, they kind of by-passed me and didn't keep me long in Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: So, so in Dublin you had to undergo physical examinations and that sort of thing?

ENGLISH: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: And then where did you go from Dublin?

ENGLISH: From Dublin then I went down to Queenstown to get the boat.

SIGRIST: And how long were you in Queenstown?

ENGLISH: I think it was only overnight.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the boat?

ENGLISH: That I couldn't, that, when I sent in the... I cannot remember was it the Caronia or the Adriatic. The only thing was I, I'm mixed up about, when I went back after three years it was one of those boats I took and I think, I'm not sure, but I thought well maybe that the company would be able to know what boat I came on. But I... I mean maybe it's not that important to know but whatever it was one of the two boats.

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SIGRIST: And what, can you describe what the accommodations were like in the boat?

ENGLISH: Oh, awful.(she laughs) There was four in a cabin and one bed up and one bed down and I was so sick that the nurse on the boat took me out of there and put me into a lower one. I was up on top and I, some of them we didn't know there was there, but we, that's what the way we traveled.

SIGRIST: Now who else was in your cabin with you?

ENGLISH: My sister, of course, that, that went home. She just finished training when my mother took sick and she said before she would, she got all of our papers and everything and before she would start she, I, I think she was inclined to go with private people. Then they were all Park Avenue and all that...

SIGRIST: So, well no I'm confused now. When you came in 1924?

ENGLISH: Yeah.

SIGRIST: When you left from Queenstown, your sister was with you?

ENGLISH: Yes.

SIGRIST: So she had come...

ENGLISH: Oh no, no, no. My sister was with me, I...

SIGRIST: When you came back in '27.

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ENGLISH: Yes, that's when my mother was sick.

SIGRIST: So you were actually travelling alone in '24?

ENGLISH: Yes, yeah.

SIGRIST: And so they put you a cabin with strangers?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes. I didn't know anyone and they were sick, too. And then they, one of the women, oh it's only about the width of the kitchen here, and during whilst I was sick, one of the women that was up there, she got sick and she was so weak she rolled off the bed and rolled over to me. I tell you, I don't know if she was hurt. I never saw her after that.

SIGRIST: Was it, was it scary being on this big boat?

ENGLISH: I didn't, I didn't care for it because it being I was so sick, I didn't. See, we came out on a timber, a tender. We didn't get the boat right in Queenstown. It went out on a tender and then from there you got onto the boat.

SIGRIST: How long was the boat ride to America?

ENGLISH: Oh it must be five days.

SIGRIST: I t was pretty quick.

ENGLISH: Ah, yes.

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SIGRIST: Did you ever get well while you were on the boat?

ENGLISH: Oh I did, the last day, of course. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you get a chance to walk around the boat at all?

ENGLISH: Yes, yes I could see it. The last day and then, of course, when I got into Ellis Island...

SIGRIST: Did you see the Statue of Liberty from the boat?

ENGLISH: Oh did I. I learned all about it in school.

SIGRIST: Yeah, so what was it like to see the Statue of Liberty?

ENGLISH: And I saw the Statue of Liberty and everyone came out to see the Statue of Liberty. And it looked so real and looked as though, it made me feel good and get over my sickness when we saw the Statue of Liberty and her arms out. It was as if she was welcoming us, you know. And I felt very good about that, really. And then we got to, we got, as I said, then off the boat. Now when the boat took us then to Ellis Island...

SIGRIST: Well you said that the boat docked and you stayed overnight on the boat.

ENGLISH: Was it what?

SIGRIST: Did you stay over?

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ENGLISH: Oh.

SIGRIST: Didn't you say you stayed over...

ENGLISH: The city...

SIGRIST: Night on the boat and then brought to Ellis Island.

ENGLISH: Yes, oh yes, yes and my sister, one of my sisters, came there thinking though everyone was out check and you know, looking to see if they could see somebody. I was there but you couldn't see with the crowd. So she got and went home. She went down there thinking she'd see me on the boat.

SIGRIST: I see.

ENGLISH: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe Ellis Island to me? What did it look like to you?

ENGLISH: Well it, to me, it was like cages, you know, and they brought you in just like you see a bunch of cattle going. And they brought you in on those, I think they had like, must be iron bars or something and they might be the width of the kitchen and two could walk in. And then they put you, they had sections like for, for the different countries; the ones that could speak English and the one couldn't speak English. And they, they put them in there but I wasn't long in there at all then.

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SIGRIST: Was it crowded there?

ENGLISH: It was, oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you feel being an English speaking person with people who didn't speak English?

ENGLISH: Oh, of course, I would feel sorry for them. I would feel so sorry for them and then the inspectors that I saw there, but this boat was a different boat than ours, the boat that brought us in from Ireland. As a matter of fact, we had no foreign people. The only foreign people we had was, I think, Hungarian. We had a few Hungarian people but they had to, they left from England. And then they came, the boat came around to Queenstown. But I, the, what I didn't like, I was listening, they would holler at them and, you know, that they weren't human beings. That I didn't like at all. So then they put us through, when I gave the papers that I took the test and everything. Then to see my vaccinations and all that stuff, they let me out and put me in a room and then they brought in my sisters.

SIGRIST: What was that like, seeing your sisters?

ENGLISH: Ah, of course, I cried and cried and cried when I saw them because my oldest sister I didn't remember too much about her. I remembered but when I saw her I didn't know it was she that was in it but my sister that was in training...

SIGRIST: Was that Mary?

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ENGLISH: Huh?

SIGRIST: Is that your sister Mary?

ENGLISH: Not at the time, no not...

SIGRIST: No, is that your sister named Mary that, there were two sisters here already, right?

ENGLISH: Yes, three. I had three but two only came to see me.

SIGRIST: I see. What were their names?

ENGLISH: My name, no first name was, the oldest girl was Delia.

SIGRIST: Delia.

ENGLISH: And then my sister that was in training was Julia.

SIGRIST: Julia.

ENGLISH: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: So you cried when you saw them?

ENGLISH: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

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SIGRIST: Did they bring a little gift or something to you?

ENGLISH: Well, not to the boat. They took me then, one, as a matter of fact my sister that was in training took me down to the hospital. And there was her classmates there.

SIGRIST: You mean right after you left Ellis?

ENGLISH: She wanted them to see me, I guess. So they took me down to the hospital to see them. Then came, my sister came home. She had to go back to work for a while and she came home from work and they had a little party. She had couple of furnished rooms, 63rd Street and 3rd Avenue and, uh...

SIGRIST: Did the sisters all live together?

ENGLISH: Hmm?

SIGRIST: Did your sisters live together?

ENGLISH: No. When my sister was in training she had to stay in the hospital.

SIGRIST: Oh.

ENGLISH: She couldn't...

SIGRIST: So where did they bring you? Where did you spend your first night in America?

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ENGLISH: I spent it with my sister and 63rd Street and 3rd Avenue.

SIGRIST: What was New York like for you?

ENGLISH: Oh.

SIGRIST: Because you've been to Dublin, so you've seen a big city.

ENGLISH: You know, I don't know what it was, why I got this idea, when I got off the tender and we got out and we took a train and it seems there was children coming from school. And they were so sloppy looking and I did say where, where, I thought they were orphans or something and they looked so dirty. I had visions of beautiful ribbons on their hair and see we were, I had uniform and that uniform had to come off as soon as you came in from school. And you washed your own uniform and you pressed it and everything. Oh, I had, there was nothing that I didn't do. That I had to do, that I had to do.

SIGRIST: But the Americans looked sloppy to you?

ENGLISH: But they were holey and the kids didn't have uniforms or anything and I thought, then we got out at, I think that we came up to 63rd Street and then they, the streets were so dirty. Garbage all around the place and I couldn't get over. I thought America, I couldn't get here fast enough, that everything was so beautiful and clean and all this. But it, I soon broke in with the whole thing.

SIGRIST: So, so talk to me a little bit about the first couple of days in America. What

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did you do?

ENGLISH: Well, cousins came to see me and they took me out to Ridgewood and we went by train out to Ridgewood. I thought I'd never get there. I thought you could walk every place like we did in Ireland; you walked miles and miles. And I thought we'd never get there. They were cousins and they kept me over a weekend. And then they had, I think I went down to the hospital for a test before Christmas. I know I didn't go to work until after Christmas. So that I think it was around, maybe the middle of November or something. I should have the dates and I don't know what I did with them and...

SIGRIST: This was a test for you to go into training?

ENGLISH: Yes. Yes, but then I thought it over and I didn't want to go. (she laughs) I thought, oh my God, all the blood you'd see, so I didn't want to go.

SIGRIST: So what, did you get a job?

ENGLISH: I got in with a decorator, an interior decorator.

SIGRIST: How? How did you go about doing that?

ENGLISH: Some friend told one of my sisters that she was opening business and that she was an employee in French and Company, one of the biggest decorators in New York City. And I went with her and did very well. We got along so good. She got a nice shop in 51st Street and Lexington Avenue. She's dead and gone now but I stayed with her for many years. But then I joined a union and they shifted you around to the different places and that

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helped a lot because you got in the, you saw different kinds of work and if you...

SIGRIST: You met a lot of people.

ENGLISH: Yes. Yes and they sent me to a place across, I can't think of the name of the place, across from the, the News Building in New York. I can't think of the name of it now. But anyways, maybe you'd be there a year and then they send you some other place to get more training. So I continued that until I retired.

SIGRIST: I see. Tell me how you spent your first Christmas in America.

ENGLISH: My first Christmas, oh, the trees and the things I thought was beautiful. Oh, that I enjoyed, really beautiful. They had a big tree and my sister had a, her, had married. No, no, she married after Christmas, must be the second Christmas I'm thinking. But then I thought, oh, that was beautiful. I enjoyed that.

SIGRIST: Did you miss your mother?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes, all the time. I really did because when I heard she was sick, my sister and I went right over.

SIGRIST: Yeah, let's talk about that second visit to Ireland.

ENGLISH: Yeah.

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SIGRIST: So, you were here three years. You were already working for the decorator by this point?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes. I was, as a matter of fact, working for, his name is Mr. Lonona. He was 42nd Street and he was antiques.

SIGRIST: Lonona?

ENGLISH: Antiques, yes.

ENGLISH: A-N-T-I...

SIGRIST: Lonona?

ENGLISH: Oh. Lonona, L-O-N-O-N-A, Lonona.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did you do? What were your responsibilities?

ENGLISH: Well, I have to like, more or less come, after the war now, that was when all the places, Smithsonian was opening up and down in Williamsburg opened up.

SIGRIST: Right, in 1920's.

ENGLISH: I used to go on trips with them and we stayed over maybe for a week, whatever would do. And all the old antiques came from the countries, foreign countries, after the war was over.

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SIGRIST: After World War I was over?

ENGLISH: Yes. No, oh, that's World War II. Oh no, I'm going ahead of myself now. I didn't do it anymore of that type work in World War I.

SIGRIST: It was later?

ENGLISH: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: It was after World War II?

ENGLISH: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Well, talk about, talk about going back to see your mother.

ENGLISH: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: How, when you went back to Ireland...

ENGLISH: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you feel having been in America for three years? Did you see it all very differently when you went back?

ENGLISH: Well, of course, I was sorry when I saw my mother die of cancer, cancer in the jawbone. And I didn't like to see her in that way and we stuck there. We stayed with her even though I was threatened I should get back on a certain date because I was, only had declared my intentions for an American

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citizen. And I had work that was back but I said, "I don't care, I'm not going to leave my mother." And I had, I had some relatives here, that they knew somebody and they wrote to him. I think his name was Justin Carow, Justice of the Supreme Court. And they got a letter from him. He wrote the letter for me and sent it over to me and I give it to the police over there. So that left me that I could stay on and I had declared my intentions for a second papers but I couldn't, I had to wait.

SIGRIST: So how long were you in Ireland the second time?

ENGLISH: It was when my mother was sick. I had, we left here in June and came back in the end of January.

SIGRIST: How long after your mother died? How long did you stay on?

ENGLISH: Oh, yeah. We stayed, my mother died the end of October and we stayed on until, until, yes October and then we came back at the end of January.

SIGRIST: Did you, I realize that you were pre-occupied with your mother's illness...

ENGLISH: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: But did you miss America while you were in Ireland?

ENGLISH: Not at the time. I, I, I was, my sister was anxious to come back, you know, and get going. And then, of course, leaving not seeing my mother there, you know, seemed to say that she was better off. She couldn't suffer like the way she was and, sad that. But I was anxious to come back for the one

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reason was the citizen papers that I couldn't over do it by staying any longer.

I had to be back in, they gave me from January to March, I had to be back in that time. So naturally enough I was anxious to come back for that.

SIGRIST: When your mother died, did you feel that you had very little connection with Ireland anymore?

ENGLISH: No, no. I would still want to see my uncles and my aunts and all that stuff. And then I wanted, my brother put up a beautiful headstone on my mother's and father's grave and I wanted to see that and...

SIGRIST: So how many, have you been back to Ireland since 1927? have you...

ENGLISH: Oh, yes. I, see my husband was born here but he was of Irish parents. And he wanted to see Ireland when he retired and I said, "Well we'll go". So he retired in 1971 or '70, '70 and soon as he retired, the first thing he asked, "Well, are we going to Ireland?" and he went out and got the passports and off with us. And then we met cousins and that. My brother was there and this child that we had grown up, he was 8 or 9 then. And he had grown up and then my sister was a dressmaker, so she was here and they had bicycles and I rode bicycles and I went here and there.

SIGRIST: Just like when you were a kid.

ENGLISH: Yes, yes, yes, yes. But my husband loved it. Oh, he doesn't know why I come to this country. Poverty sent me (she laughs) to the country. But he didn't know why all the people in Ireland wanted to come out here. But they had to, they had such big families. There was no other thing to do.

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SIGRIST: Sure.

ENGLISH: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, in fact, along these lines my final question to you is, are you glad that you came? Was America the right decision for you?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes. I, definitely because I got along so good and I met beautiful people and, as I said, we worked in such nice places and met nice people, rich people and poor people and everything. Everything was very nice.

SIGRIST: What do you think would have happened to you if you had stayed in Ireland? What kind of life do you think you would have had?

ENGLISH: Well, I don't know. I really don't know because I wasn't that, I think I had in my mind that I wanted come out here with the intentions that I go in training in the hospital my sister was but I didn't see it.

SIGRIST: You followed a very different route.

ENGLISH: (She laughs) I didn't see it.

SIGRIST: Well, Mrs. English, I want to thank you for taking your time and allowing us all out, all four of us, Brian and Peter and Janet and I.

ENGLISH: Yeah. Well, that's nice to have you but I didn't expect four of you.

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SIGRIST: Well, thank you. This is Paul Sigrist...

ENGLISH: But that's nice that you brought them.

SIGRIST: We bring our own party where ever we go.

ENGLISH: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: This Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service.

END OF INTERVIEW

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