

**EI-982**

**DESMOND BLACK**

**BIRTHDATE: JULY 17, 1913**

**INTERVIEW DATE: MARCH 12, 1998**

**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 84**

**RUNNING TIME: 53:46**

**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.**

**RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.**

**INTERVIEW LOCATION: ULSTER AMERICAN FOLK PARK**

**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:**

**NORTHERN IRELAND, 1929**

**AGE: 16**

**SHIP: TRANSYLVANIA**

**PORT:**

**RESIDENCES:**

LEVINE: Okay. Today is March 12, 1998 and I am here at the Ulster American Folk Park with Mr. Desmond Black, who left Northern Ireland at the age of 16 in 1929 and returned to Northern Ireland in 1936. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, the Ellis Island Immigration Museum and I—we have been walking around the Folk Park. And I want to say I am very happy that I'm able to talk with you, Mr. Black. And if you would start at the beginning with your birth date and where you were born.

BLACK: [unclear] but I would say first of all that I'm very pleased that—to be able to have this opportunity to talk with you. So I will now tell you where I was born. I was born in Omagh [PP] on the date that you just mentioned, I think, didn't you—1913—17<sup>th</sup> of July, 1913.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And what was your father's name?

BLACK: David Black.

LEVINE: And your mother's name?

BLACK: Ann [PP].

LEVINE: And your mother's maiden name.

BLACK: Scott.

LEVINE: Okay. And was that S-C-O-T-T?

BLACK: S-C-O-T-T.

LEVINE: T-T.

BLACK: Correct.

LEVINE: Okay. And so when you were born, did you live in the town of Omagh?

BLACK: Yes, I lived in the town of Omagh.

LEVINE: And your father—you mentioned before—

BLACK: Yes.

LEVINE: Tell what your father did at that time.

BLACK: He was an estate agent and a merchant. He sold farm machinery and hardware.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And as an estate—you said an estate agent?

BLACK: Estate agent, an auctioneer. Estate agent.

LEVINE: Oh, so he was an auctioneer?

BLACK: Yes.

LEVINE: Oh.

BLACK: He was, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: That's right, yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about his—his work from when you were a little boy?

BLACK: Well, you know childish memories. We—they lived in town. My father had two shops in town, maybe, and we lived over one of them. And there was a communication telephone. Telephones were few; there were not all that many but we had one anyway from one shop to the other. And my father and mother both worked, really, and they were quite busy. And we didn't see maybe as much of our parents as some other children did or some of our friends did because of—for that reason.

LEVINE: Was your father—your mother working in—in—

BLACK: She worked in the office with the father pretty much, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: And we had domestic help to run the home, you see, so, really, we didn't see as much of our parents as a lot of other children would do.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So what would you have, someone that cooked or—

BLACK: Well, we would have had—really, I mean, [chuckles]—I don't want to appear bombastic with the thing.

LEVINE: No, [unclear].

BLACK: But you'd appreciate the facts are that really that with—that my father had quite a business and we had a—we had one maid constantly. And we had a charwoman that came in to do the washing and we usually had a second maid to do something or other. There were usually three domestic helpers in the house.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now—

BLACK: Because we had a big family. See, I had four brothers, see, and a sister and a father and mother. And, see, my mother hadn't really much time for domestic work or anything like that, you see. So—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: —those were the circumstances.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, were both your mother and father born in Omagh or had they come from someplace else?

BLACK: No, my father came from [unclear], Londonderry. And my mother was born in Omagh. My mother's people were farmers. They lived about three miles out of town.

LEVINE: And—

BLACK: My father came from Draperstown [PP], from Draperstown.

LEVINE: That's in Londonderry?

BLACK: That's where he was born; that's correct.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, in the birth order, who was the oldest?

BLACK: My sister.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And her name?

BLACK: Gin [PP].

LEVINE: And—and then, who came next?

BLACK: Brad [PP] Herbert and my bro—another brother, Robert, and Bill.

LEVINE: And you were the baby?

BLACK: And I was the next. And Sam—the youngest one was Sam. Desmond and then Sam.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: He was the youngest.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, when you think about your childhood, what are the kinds of things that you remember when you think back of growing up in Omagh?

BLACK: Visits to the country, visiting people in the country are number one.

LEVINE: Did you have grandparents? Did you ever visit them?

BLACK: Well, they had been living in Crookstown [PP] but they had moved to Omagh. My earliest memories were my grandfather and grandmother living in Omagh. And we visited them and I suppose the earliest memories would be going out to the country and seeing the farm animals and so on, because we had been living in town. It was a change and we used to go out and visit friends there often on a Sunday afternoon, and we

always enjoyed that. But then we had the usual sport of [unclear] and so on, whatever, you know. The usual games and went to—went sleighing in the wintertime and things like that when the weather permitted, and fishing and the normal life of teenagers [unclear].

LEVINE: And how about school?

BLACK: That—well, I suppose normal convention of school. One went to school [unclear] and came home for lunch. And that was, I suppose, nothing very spectacular about that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. And how about religion?

BLACK: Well, we were Presbyterians, of course, and—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. What sort of [unclear]?

BLACK: But we were not—normal Presbyterians. We were not—I think we were broadminded in all respects, I think, and accepted other people's views on life and we took no strong opinions on things like that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Okay, now, let's see. When—so you mentioned earlier that it was your brother who left first. Is that right?

BLACK: Two of my brothers left. Yes, they went to the States first and they were happy there.

LEVINE: And which two were they?

BLACK: Herbert and Bill. That was the—Herbert and Bill.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember approximately what year they left?

BLACK: Oh, well, that would be some—I suppose two or three years ahead and I couldn't just—I couldn't tell you just exactly the date. But two or three years prior to that [unclear] '20—'27—probably '27. Right about that, I think. So they were quite happy.

LEVINE: And how old were they, roughly? They were—were they about 16?

BLACK: They—they were older than me. They would have been—Herbert would have been about 9—16. He must have been near 9 years older—16. He would maybe about—oh, yes, a little—maybe 23 or something on that—[unclear]. About 23—22, 23.

LEVINE: Now, are you aware of—of why they went when they did?

BLACK: Well, not really. I think they just wanted to move out. I think they wanted to travel. And it's a big wide world and I think they always thought, 'Well, we live in a provincial town. I want to see what it's all about.' I think that was the general feeling with both of them, really.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

BLACK: I had another brother had the same feeling and he went to Nairobi. He went to Kenya.

LEVINE: Now, was he the oldest one?

BLACK: So there you are. No, he was—he was—he was not the oldest. He was the—let me think a little bit. He was the second. He was the second. Herbert was the oldest and he was next.

LEVINE: Hmm. And he went to Kenya.

BLACK: He went—he went—he went to—to Kenya prior to me going to the States, yes.

LEVINE: Do you know why—

BLACK: Before that.

LEVINE: —he went to Kenya?

BLACK: Well he was a—he was a solicitor [unclear]. He was qualified solicitor. And I think he read about the opportunities, I think, for the [unclear] profession in Kenya. So he thought that would suit him and I think the salaries offered appealed to him and the way of life. So that's why—why he went off there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: Yes.

LEVINE: Well, how did your mother and father feel about her sons leaving for far-away places?

BLACK: Well, they never really expressed an opinion very much about it, but I'm sure they wouldn't be all that pleased, really in a way. They just wouldn't be delighted, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: But after they both went to the States for holidays at times—you know, after that they both had—they both had been there, really.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and what did—

BLACK: Visit to the States. And that's pretty well it.

LEVINE: What did Herbert and Bill do?

BLACK: [unclear] Herbert. Herbert—Herbert was—Herbert's an engineer, electrical engineer.

LEVINE: Now, was he trained here before he went to the—

BLACK: Well he had some training here but then he qualified in the States and he was [unclear] New York [unclear] Rapid Transit Company in the States. And just prior to the war or sometime shortly after the war, he—he went to Bermuda with the American army. And he was taken off to the power stations in Bermuda for the American forces.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BLACK: And Bill stayed on in the States and he—Bill stayed in the—in the States. And he went into—more or less, he was more interested in factoring and business and things like that. And he took quite an interest in that and he started an ice cream factory out in New Jersey.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BLACK: So that's pretty well the story about—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: —about that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, did—did he go to school too when he got to the United States?

BLACK: No, he was older when he left. He was older than me, you see?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: He didn't go to school, no.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: In the states, no. He didn't, no.

LEVINE: So—so then why was it that you happened to go in 1929?

BLACK: Well, suppose my two [coughs]—two older brothers had gone and they were happy with it, and they were painting rosy pictures and they were happy with it. Then my other brother took himself off to Kenya so I thought 'Well, I'm living in this small town. I want to go out and see what it's all about too.' So I went out, not knowing whether or not I would stay, so my parents agreed that I would go. So I went out and I quite liked it and then I went to school there for a year, a year and a half. And then I started with the Chase Manhattan—International Acceptance [PP] Bank at that time, anyway. And then I became the Chase Manhattan Bank eventually on 40 Wall Street.

LEVINE: Oh.

BLACK: So that was the story—

LEVINE: Oh very nice.

BLACK: —at that day. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Well, just tell me about when you decided to go. Do you remember what you expected? Do you have—can you sort of get back to what you were thinking and feeling about going to the United States?

BLACK: Well, of course [laughs] [coughs] we had no television in those days. You had to use your imagination a little bit and you could read between the lines on the matters that we were getting from my two brothers that had been there. And of course we had quite a lot of friends that had been in the States as well, and a number of Ulster people have been there. And you formed a general opinion about what it would be like.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: And we lived on a provincial town, you know, where the bright lights and everything that appealed to you at that age as a schoolboy. You thought 'This is great,' you know, want to go somewhere with some action and life.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: And I suppose that was pretty much the reason why I went there. [laughs]

LEVINE: Well—

BLACK: And at that age it suited me very nicely, really.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BLACK: I mean to say you're carefree at that age and in your teens, you know, and it was super. And I must say I really did enjoy it. I got a big kick out of it.

LEVINE: Do you remember—

BLACK: It was really good and I had a very happy life when I was there. But the job that I was in, well, it never was—I was more or less [unclear] into it, but always wanted to do my own thing. You know, I never was completely satisfied. I wasn't getting a—I can't have a feeling of achievement on anything on my own. It wasn't—just, it wasn't my line and that was it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: But I enjoyed it while I was there. The people were very nice to me. I got on very well with them all, really. And certainly, I am glad and always was glad that I went to the States.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, were you traveling by yourself when you decided to go?

BLACK: Oh, yes. I was.

LEVINE: Did you have to go to Belfast?

BLACK: Yeah.

LEVINE: Have a medical exam before you left? Do you remember anything about that?

BLACK: I had to have it so—yes. Yes, I think so. Yes, we had to—had to do that. Yes, had to go to Belfast for that. Yes. We had, yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the preparation?

BLACK: I can't remember an awful lot about it, really.

LEVINE: Okay.

BLACK: No, not really an awful lot and I can't remember much about that, but remember going, oh, right from Londonderry.

LEVINE: So how did you get to Londonderry when you left Omagh?

BLACK: Went on the train to Londonderry and I think we went on the train—maybe—I don't know. Yeah. I think we—I went on the train, yes, and stayed in the Metropol [PP] Hotel in Londonderry that—the night before because the ship was [unclear] at something getting in. It was to go in the evening and I stayed in the Metropol Hotel in Londonderry and went out in the [unclear] boat in the morning. And we met the steamer at [unclear].

LEVINE: And [unclear]—

BLACK: That was it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And it was the Transylvania.

BLACK: The Cunard Liner Transylvania, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: A very nice ship, was beautiful. I thought it was lovely.

LEVINE: Describe the ship.

BLACK: The service was—well, I mean, as a youngster, I mean we hadn't seen ships before at that age. We had seen boats but not ships. At least, I hadn't but [unclear]. I'm certain it was something magnificent to see it. It was so large, so powerful and you felt so safe and comfortable on it. And you walked on board and the dining room was superb, really. It was as good, I would say, as any four-star hotel that you'd—would visit today. Nice linen tablecloths and good cutlery and everything. It really was beautiful.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: But there seemed to be no stabilizers [unclear] weather [unclear] because the ship rocked quite a lot. And the first day and a half [coughs] it was no picnic. Everything was rosy until I set down for dinner and then the whole thing changed. The picture changed completely and I was violently ill for at least a day and a half. I didn't care the boat went down; it was that bad. It was the most awful sickness ever I had in my life. Then the next day the sun came out. It was rosy after that. It really was beautiful.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of the other passengers on the ship?

BLACK: Well, remember talking—yes, yes. A lot of going there full of hope. Some had been there before but most of them were immigrants going [unclear]. You know, you met different types.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: Different views, different opinions, but mostly they were emigrants [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and your feeling going—

BLACK: Intended to stay.

LEVINE: Sorry.

BLACK: I beg your pardon?

LEVINE: Your—your feeling when going there was that you might come back but you might stay? Or you just—did you have a—an idea then?

BLACK: Well, I had a strong feeling that I would stay. I thought it was rosy and had nice pictures of it and everything, the reports that we were getting, you know. I felt that I would stay but I wasn't quite sure I would.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: Had that feeling that I would stay if it lived up—up to my expectations; that was my intention.

LEVINE: And you mentioned earlier that you don't think there was a steerage or a third class on the—

BLACK: Oh, definitely. Oh, there wasn't definitely. Definitely, there was—oh, yes. There was second class [unclear] or whatever. There was certainly second class.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: Well, there was, indeed.

LEVINE: Oh.

BLACK: Yes.

LEVINE: But the steerage, you don't remember that, or third class?

BLACK: No.

LEVINE: Maybe—

BLACK: I think steerage was mentioned. I don't think it was—it was—

LEVINE: It was third class, probably. Not steerage.

BLACK: Third class was more—yeah, steerage was mentioned but third class came into the picture more.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: More often.

LEVINE: Okay. So then, do you remember when the ship came into the New York harbor?

BLACK: I do. The date, you mean?

LEVINE: No. Do you remember coming into the harbor?

BLACK: I remember—I remember—I remember [unclear] open deck waiting to see the—coming in that way, approaching to see what I could see. And I could see—the first thing to see was the Statue of Liberty so very obvious and clear and distinct. It was a lovely, sunny day. It was beautiful. I remember that very well. [unclear]

LEVINE: And were people—

BLACK: People waiting for the arrivals, yes. [coughs] That's right.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And then do you remember arriving? What happened?

BLACK: Well, the last—last dinner we had just before—before we embarked, actually, I remember sitting down to dinner and there was some commotion going on. And the next thing I could see was—the first New York policeman we met was at the door, great big man. He was lightly colored, great big, well-built man. And he spoke to one of the passengers. And the passenger then sat down again. He stood at the door waiting for him, for whatever mess he had got about him; I don't know. Man finished his meat and then he went off with the—with the policeman. He—the police—the policeman came out with the pilot boat actually before we disembarked. And he was waiting for him, obviously, had got a message for some reason or other. So that was one of the things that you remember from the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: That would be a first impression.

BLACK: [unclear] arriving, a first impression.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, wow.

BLACK: And that was it.

LEVINE: Well, did—did you have any thoughts about that or were you—thought it—was going on?

BLACK: Well, not really. I got the impression, well, these Yankee policemen aren't slipping up and they know what they're doing all right. And this was a very sturdy-looking fellow and he's got his revolver on there and he looks like he means business. You know. [laughs] [coughs] But when I was there, I must say that you'd hear so many stories about the place and New York and so on. But I never had any complaints against them; always found them reasonable and pleasant, I must say. Most of them were decent men, I think.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: And as far as I was concerned, I was [unclear] with the conditions.

LEVINE: Now, were your brothers there to meet you?

BLACK: They were, yes. They were both there to meet me.

LEVINE: And how was that?

BLACK: And went back to Bay Ridge [PP]. Well, they had arranged to meet me. Everything was fine. That was grand.

LEVINE: And how did you get to Bay Ridge?

BLACK: Subway, on the subway.

LEVINE: And how was that for you?

BLACK: It was grand for sure. it was just great, very—so convenient. Just walk down to the platform and there you go, underground, shoot right through. It was great, very fast service. And at that time you traveled for five cents. No matter where you went in New York, it was five cents.

LEVINE: And how—

BLACK: It was a very good means of transport. Excellent.

LEVINE: How about other first impressions that first night or first few days and weeks about New York, Bay Ridge, Brooklyn?

BLACK: Well, you couldn't help but be impressed, I mean particularly when you come from a provincial town, you know, with 16 years [several words unclear] to the center of New York City. I mean, anyone would be impressed with that. And the first day, we couldn't get downtown quick enough. The next morning—the next morning, what's—I'm trying to remember what happened. I—I think none of my brothers were available or had to go to work or something or other. But the next morning I got up anyway, got on the subway. I had taken note from my going down the day before what train we went on to Times Square, and I thought, 'I'm going to get down to Time Square.' So I got on the subway that morning. I headed out [coughs] down to Time Square. And I remember getting off and looking round and I thought, 'I won't go too far for—no, I'm not too sure of my bearings here.' And you know, I had a little look around, kept watching the subway system that I came from all the time, and I was just quite amazed to see the [unclear], the flatiron bending and all the traffic and so on. It was quite fascinating and colorful. Vitality and life was obvious. So went back again and that was it and—

LEVINE: And then what did you do at first when you—

BLACK: Well, a few weeks after that, then I went back to school. You see, they kept showing me around. They took me around. We drove around here and there, the various places of interest, so on, and visited friends. And then I went to school then on—on Bay Ridge.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, were the friends—were some of the friends people from here? From around—

BLACK: Well, they would have been, yes. Some had distant cousins and so on, yes.

LEVINE: And how did you find Brooklyn College?

BLACK: Well, [unclear]—some of my friends there.

LEVINE: Oh.

BLACK: That's how I found it.

LEVINE: That you had known from here?

BLACK: That we had known from here. Well, I mean they weren't all relatives. But I mean, my two brothers had a number of friends there, you see. Obviously, they had neighbors and people they associated with and I just [unclear]—I just quite can't remember which one suggested that I go there. But was the nearest one to go there. It was the [unclear] to do it, you know. Transport and everything. And I remember the first day I went to school to—I forget. I can't quite remember who took me and how I got to school the first day. But I remember the second day. Another student said, "I'll call for you in the morning." I said, "That's fine." And I said, "Why will he call for me? I wonder what does he mean by that?" So he came along with this old banger. Well, [unclear] 16. No children here ever drove cars at 16 years of age. This car—this chap [unclear] up in this great big Buick car, the doors hanging off an [unclear]. [laughs] Everything on the body, I think, was taking something—see coming from a circus. Then when—I got on board and he usually called for me and took me to school. And it was amazing to see the [unclear] of many cars parked, the youngsters parking the cars in the school, you know, which was quite unusual. We usually walked to school. Always went on bicycles but no one ever drove. [chuckles] So it was quite—quite something. And the school was so massive that I remember at lunch time we used to get—the lunch that we used get I thought was quite [unclear] for teenage—it wasn't—I mean to say it wasn't the type of service you'd get at the Ritz. But for a school, it was very good, I thought. We used to get—for example, for lunch we'd get a big mug with beans—baked beans and a spoon [unclear]. A spoon—that was [several words unclear] way to serve it. But, you know, the hamburgers and things, a different type of diet that we were not accustomed to. But I took it all in my stride and everything was all right. I quite enjoyed it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And were you sure about what you wanted to study when you went there?

BLACK: Well, not really. No. Just had to make my mind up then what I would do, so still studied finance and that was it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: Administration and finance in the last year. That was it.

LEVINE: Now, how about the community that you socialized with? Were most of the people you socialized with people who had come from Northern Ireland or not or—

BLACK: [coughs] Well, I suppose you would—since my two brothers were there, you could say that we did associate with lots of people—other people from

Ulster, naturally. But as far as my friends—personal friends were concerned of my age—my age group, actually, it was ones that I had contacted and—and—and—in the office when I was working. And they weren't nes—they weren't—in fact, none of them came from Northern Ireland at all. A lot of them weren't Irish. One of them was an Italian. Another chap was a German. Didn't make any difference. The one you met at work, the ones you associated with during the day, they were the ones that I got friendly with, really. And, you know, it made it a little more different and colorful. And different views were expressed and different ways of life. And, you know, it was enlightening, really, and I thought—

LEVINE: Hmm. How about—

BLACK: [unclear]

LEVINE: How about at Brooklyn College at that time? Were there a lot of people who had immigrated to the United States as students?

BLACK: Well, I can't—I don't remember much about that aspect of it, really. I seem to—no, I wouldn't have—I don't know. That wasn't very apparent to me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: No, [unclear] where. They, of course, were used—with a kind of a different way of life. It was a city life with different views of things. And [unclear] I'd go [unclear]. You know, coming from a small town, you see. And Ulster was a different way of life. [several words unclear] about and so on. And they spoke and expressed themselves more than we did with the teachers. It was a more free and easy-going atmosphere [several words unclear]. You know. [laughs]

LEVINE: So you found that to your liking?

BLACK: I found that to my liking. I thought this was so relaxed. It was so different, you know. That wasn't as—as—I mean, you could speak [unclear]. You only spoke when [unclear] the teacher asked you something. You got permission to speak, you know? But there they were saying, "Hey, Miss Murphy. What about [unclear]? How is this and how is that?" You know, and I thought this [unclear] someone to talk like that. [chuckles] They talked in kind of equal terms, you know. And I thought, 'Well, this really is super.'

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: I thought it was very nice, a nice, free and easy manner, and they seemed to get through easier. And not the same formality that we have in Irish schools. You know, at that time. It's changed a bit now but in those days, you know, it was different. Yes. It was quite—quite surprising really, the attitude, you know, and the way they addressed each other and so on. And it was a nice, free and easy manner. Teachers were very good—quite impressed with them, really—the ones that I had, anyway. Very pleasant indeed. It didn't take very long to adapt to their way of life, you know.

LEVINE: And how about your brothers? Did you notice that they had changed? In some way become more Americanized and what changes did you notice in them?

BLACK: Well, I suppose they had changed a bit. You would notice that, yes, they had to kind of make themselves understood. No matter where you go you have to make yourself understood. And they had a more of American accent—they had and there was a change in that respect. Of course, the whole way of life had changed because the people were—you see, when they were working [unclear] we had a flat together. We dined out a lot, you know, and had a different variety, different menu and different way of life. It was all obvious and apparent. You had to readjust and they had readjusted in many ways, attitude to life and so on, their views on certain things, you know. You had a kind of a—a broader view of life, I suppose one would say. And that was pretty well at—that was it.

LEVINE: How do you look back on that time?

BLACK: How do—

LEVINE: How do you look back on that time with your—

BLACK: Look back on it.

LEVINE: —three brothers there in—in—in Bay Ridge?

BLACK: How do I look back on it?

LEVINE: Yeah.

BLACK: Oh, it was—I enjoyed it thoroughly. It was very good.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: I was very happy with it, yes. We had a lot of fun, you know. And living there, that was so convenient. The traveling was—was very, very, very—

it was very—very efficient, really. You went to New York on the [unclear] Express in no time. I suppose you know that [unclear] Express.  
[chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-hmm.

BLACK: Well, that's the one we traveled on to work. But in the mornings I supposed—I mean, at our age I didn't mind it. It was quite nice, the traveling. But in the rush hours you would have to hold onto the straps and the guards would often have to push the doors to get them to close. And we were packed in very, very tight. It wasn't—a lot of people say it wasn't a pleasant journey. But at that age of 18 you don't care. You bang in [unclear] was quite all right. Didn't mind that in the least at all.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: And what was Bay Ridge like in—at—at that time?

BLACK: At that time, it was a very nice residential area. It's along the coast there, you know. You can see all of the Hudson River, right on the edge of the Hudson there. And you see the ships come in and going out along the coast road there. It was very nice, really. And I don't know. I think it has deteriorated a little bit from [unclear]. But at that time, it was quite a nice place to live in, really.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: It was really nice.

LEVINE: Do you know why your brothers picked Bay Ridge to live?

BLACK: I wouldn't know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: I suppose because it was—it wasn't so congested along there. And the Shore Road was—it was appeal to them, which was—and make it right into the city center [unclear] where you wanted to go. I suppose that was the reason why.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: Then a little after that—I forget now for what reason; I suppose maybe a matter of convenience too—but we moved down to 12<sup>th</sup> Street to Greenwich Village.

LEVINE: All three of you?

BLACK: And we had a flat there. I beg your pardon?

LEVINE: The three of you?

BLACK: The three of us, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: And that was great. We enjoyed that. [several words unclear] give it a good name, really, because it's so quiet and so nice and a lot of artistic people about and so on. Most interesting [unclear]. You can walk in peace. It's not like banging about up at the Time Square, Union Square. I mean, you can just stroll around there, the same as you would [unclear]. You know, it was so nice and quiet and so colorful too, so many artistic people and so on. Chinatown was just around the corner a little bit there. And—and the [unclear] wasn't so nice but they were all within walking distance pretty much. But it was really quite fascinating and certainly enjoyed it. We had quite a nice flat there. We had—it was a different way of life, of course, [unclear] a flat with the central heating and everything. And the chute—just threw the garbage out and the chute, just open the door and then it shot to the basement. Caretaker looked after all that. And, you know, it was—it was really quite comfortable and a good way of life really.

LEVINE: Now, you—

BLACK: In many ways.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: But of course, as far as the office was concerned, I mean that's all right and nice, looking at the sunny sides of it. But then when you start to think of it, the traveling, I suppose you could say the same thing about any city. But it would take an hour and a—maybe an hour and a half, an hour and a quarter for a lot of the people to get to work down to—to Wall Street and back again. I thought, 'Oh, this life is all right in a way.' But after a few years, I thought—in the wintertime the snow was really terrible. It gets frightfully cold in the wintertime. And the traffic—I thought, 'This is [unclear] my life, an hour and a half to get to work. Maybe if I live here in this winter'—I thought, "I'll head off for the sunshine here to California.'

[chuckles] [coughs] So one of my brothers got married and the other brother said, "I'll go with you." I said, "Right." I said, "I'll go home now first because I've been here a long time and when we come back we'll go to California in the sunshine." So when I came home he decided he would get married too, so then I didn't go back. And I was happy enough so that put an end to that. [laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So your brother, did he marry someone in New York?

BLACK: He did, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: Yes.

LEVINE: And did he ever go to California?

BLACK: No, he went to—he's the one who went to Bermuda.

LEVINE: Oh, he went to Bermuda.

BLACK: He got hay fever.

LEVINE: Oh.

BLACK: In New York. And every time they left New York—when he came home for a holiday—he came twice home for a holiday. And whenever he went out of New York about one day the hay fever disappeared. So he thought he'd go to Bermuda. So then he—just about the start of the war then he went to Bermuda with the American Army. He was very pleased at that and he had no hay fever while he was there, and he had a very lovely life there.

LEVINE: Oh.

BLACK: For many years.

LEVINE: And how about your brother, Bill? Was that—

BLACK: He stayed on. He was the one I was telling you about. He started an ice cream factory and he stayed on and he retired in Florida several years after that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And so when you came back and found that your brother's getting married, what—what were the pros and cons that you weighed about staying or going back to New York?

BLACK: Well, I thought, 'If I go back to New York and face the winter again, and it wasn't the life that I really liked, as far as the office concerned—I had friends, was happy enough then. But it wasn't—I thought, 'It's not my life, really, to travel an hour and a half to work and back again.' And I went to New York. And to me, then going to California on my own where I knew no one, I thought, 'I'm not, you know, all that fond with that either.' So I decided then just to stay at home.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. So do you think you cha—you had changed in those, what, six years? Let's see, you came back in 1936.

BLACK: Right.

LEVINE: So it's seven years.

BLACK: That's right.

LEVINE: Do you think you had changed much? What—did—did you develop certain aspects that maybe you wouldn't have—qualities you wouldn't have necessarily developed if you hadn't—

BLACK: When I had been in the States?

LEVINE: Yeah.

BLACK: Oh, I would think so.

LEVINE: What do you think?

BLACK: Well, you see, Northern Ireland, a million and a half of a population, you see. It's very confining, you know, and very conventional and so on. And [several words unclear] conventional ideas, and with things and ways of life and so on. I'm not suggesting that my people were bigoted in any way because they were not. They were broadminded, really. I must say that. We always were. But you're restricted in your views and, you know, I think you change, really, when you meet other people from different parts, different customs and different ways of life. That opens up a—more or less, a—a new line of thought for you. You see things in a completely different light, I think. I certainly—no, I would—I was pleased to have that. I thought that an advantage really. I thought I had learned quite a lot. I wouldn't say—I suppose [chuckles] when you're 18 you think you know a lot more than you really do [several words unclear]. But I felt that, nevertheless—that I had learned a lot and [several words unclear] me. Yes, I certainly felt that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And did—and—

BLACK: You see.

LEVINE: —what—

BLACK: You know. A million and a half people here in Northern Ireland, you know; you're restricted a lot, you know. I suppose we're all conventional to a degree.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: It takes someone to open you up a little bit and see things different, a new perspective on life.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So did you—you didn't continue with banking once you came back here?

BLACK: No. No I didn't. No. Went into business with my father then. He had—he had quite a—quite a substantial business he had going. So I just did it all. I took a job—first of all, when I came back, I thought, 'Well, you know, [unclear] do that.' But he wanted me to go with him. But I took a job then with Farnen's [PP] Mail Order Stores and [unclear] for the people. They were looking for a manager for Northern Ireland and Scotland. So I took a job with them for a couple of years. Then I [unclear] on back to my father's business.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So this was the estate agent?

BLACK: That's right, and hardware business and farm—farm machinery and—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: —hardware.

LEVINE: And then—

BLACK: And estate agency business, yes.

LEVINE: And is that what you continued doing?

BLACK: That's what I—well, I—I floated then into—and really more—more into furniture then, really.

LEVINE: Oh.

BLACK: Furniture and transport. I changed more or less to furniture and transport my last number of years [unclear] the last 20 years. So was when I was in business, changed to furniture and transport.

LEVINE: What—what does transport mean? What—

BLACK: Running trucks. Used to run trucks to transport business, moving goods from here to England, so on. I moved quite a lot of the trips from England and back again, their families and so on from here to England and— together with all the household movers to England and Scotland, [unclear] vans—

LEVINE: Oh.

BLACK: I had quite a—quite a number of vans I had activated. I think I had 10— 10 or 12 vans—10, 12 mover vans.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: So that kept me pretty well occupied. Then I thought I worked—I worked long enough. Met a chap one day, went out for coffee and met this chap going out for coffee in the morning and had a very busy day and the phone ringing all day. I thought this was a bit tiresome, a really—a really [unclear] for my coffee, getting away from everything. I usually did walk out to clear my head a little bit, as I used to say. This chap put a—put a carrot into the machine and got money out. I said, “How do you do that?” He says, “Just put the carrot [unclear] and it shoots the money out.” I went up to the bank, got one of those and I thought, ‘Well, I’ll stop working there. Three months from now I’m going to pack it you and you can get it as handy as that. It’s better than working for it.’ [laughter] So I decided to stop then and three months later I packed it all up.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: So that’s the life. That’s it.

LEVINE: Had you left Omagh before you went to the United States? Had you been to England, Scotland, other places before you left for New—New York?

BLACK: The only place I had been was the one big deal with the Boy Scouts. That was some big deal with a—a number of other chaps from town here. Went to this Boy Scout Jamboree in Birkenhead [PP]. We got the boat from Belfast [unclear]. And that was some big deal, we thought [chuckles]—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: —at that age.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: That was something. [unclear] a World Jamboree in Europe. That was the only place that—the only time we had been out of Northern Ireland.

LEVINE: How old were you, about, at that—

BLACK: At that time? That was just before we went to the States. Sixteen.

LEVINE: Oh.

BLACK: Yes. A number of my pals from around town were there too. So that's something that lives with you too.

LEVINE: So what did you do?

BLACK: That's some big deal, that was. Pardon?

LEVINE: What did you do at the Boy Scout Jamboree? What—

BLACK: Oh, what—the usual games. You know, running and all kinds of things and tying knots and camping and lighting fires, and lighting fires with a flint and so on. [chuckles] Tying knots, they say, and things like that and putting up tents. Various things of that nature, you know. [unclear]

LEVINE: So you had a good first experience, in a way.

BLACK: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: Swimming and everything. They teach you so much, you know, as you get [unclear]. That is. And then you have to cook and do your own thing, take your meal out of a tin can type of thing. You know, it's all right for boys and girls, [several words unclear] something similar.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: It's great. You can do for yourself. Teaches you to—to provide for yourself and do your own cooking and so on.

LEVINE: Now, how about—

BLACK: Doesn't do any harm.

LEVINE: —the Depression? Did that affect you, either in New York or when you came back here?

BLACK: Well, I suppose when we came here there was—there was—I mean, there was no great prosperity. Let's face it. That—when—when we went away it was no great prosperity either. But there was no extreme poverty as—not—I suppose I was fortunate. I don't know. I could see it in the States but I mean, it didn't—as far as I was concerned, it did not really affect me, fortunately. It didn't. And I was amazed to read about it and to see about it, so many people, even when I was in the office [unclear] the bank I couldn't understand. But people saying they couldn't get jobs or anything because, well, me or any of my pals from Ulster here had looked for jobs. They had no [unclear] getting them. I really formed the opinion that American people had been getting it too soft. They don't go after the things. They don't get up and go and fish for it. And that was the feeling that I had, really. I—I—I—I had to—I couldn't see why lots of them couldn't get jobs. Honestly, I couldn't see it. No.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BLACK: It was amazing. I couldn't really see it. I know it was obvious that they couldn't get them but I don't know. But I used to see—I remember seeing in the winter after the Wall Street crash in 1929—saw [unclear] Army trucks at Time Square handing out free—free—free cups of coffee and sandwiches. It was quite an eye opener. It was a terrible state of affairs, really. You could see so much—so much of it in the city, so many people unemployed. Strange thing. I [several words unclear] American people [several words unclear] that I knew from Ulster. That seemed strange. I really think the reason for it was that they had got too soft, that they didn't know how to fish for it. Of course, you could see it when you went to Ireland. But of course, that was the trouble with colored people because they were at disadvantage, I suppose you could say. But I mean, you could see then the poverty there all the time. But it's a different story. That was—that was certain. It was certain there was poverty there.

LEVINE: Did you have occasion to go to Ireland?

BLACK: Pardon?

LEVINE: Did—did you have occasion to go to Ireland?

BLACK: Oh, not a [unclear]. Just curiosity. Living in the city, you wanted to see the whole of it, to see everything.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

BLACK: We used to go up 121<sup>st</sup> Street.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, yeah. How about when—

BLACK: Then sat and looked up on Central Park. We used to enjoy Central Park on a Sunday, row—get a boat out there and row. Central Park's lovely. One of the greatest assets New Yorkers got, I think, is Central Park.

LEVINE: I agree.

BLACK: It's just a wonderful place to—to walk in, away from all the hustle of the city within a few minutes. It's just marvelous with the lakes and animals and everything there. It's a magnificent place to be in the lakes and rowing and everything. [unclear] there and everything. That's [unclear]—that's a [unclear] New York City. No question about that. Yes.

LEVINE: It's beautiful.

BLACK: Indeed.

LEVINE: Well, now did you meet your wife when you came—came back here?

BLACK: Yes, when I came back. Yes, that's right. When I came back and met my wife, yes. That's right.

LEVINE: And how did you meet?

BLACK: When I was with Farnen's at that time the—the—that was before I started with my father again. When I was With Farnen's the [unclear] and—and mail order—mail order stores, I was in Londonderry and I met her at Donegal's [PP]. She lived on Donegal [PP], which is just over the border a little bit from Londonderry. I went to a dance there and that's where we met. That was in 19—19—oh, 1940—'40—'42, I think or something. Something like that.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. So you've been back a little while.

BLACK: Yeah, back a little while. Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And what is your wife's name?

BLACK: Elizabeth.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

BLACK: Margaret Elizabeth Marshal [PP].

LEVINE: Marshal.

BLACK: Marshall. Elizabeth Marshal from Donegal. She came from East Donegal. A lot of Marshals—

LEVINE: Is—is that one I at the end?

BLACK: —[unclear]. I beg your pardon?

LEVINE: One I at the end?

BLACK: One I. M-A-R-S-H-A-L.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And do you have children?

BLACK: I have four, yes. They're not children now. [laughter]

LEVINE: Grown children, uh-huh. And—

BLACK: One—one must [coughs]—the eldest one—we called him the Gestapo—the Gestapo man, we called him, because he's with the—with the Income Tax—Income Tax inspector. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Are they all here?

BLACK: No, they live in—four of them live in Wales and two of them live in Belfast.

LEVINE: Oh.

BLACK: Four. My daughter married a Welshman.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: And the other one married a chap in Belfast. My daughter in Wales has four children.

LEVINE: Oh.

BLACK: In fact, there's one of them went to college [several words unclear] in Dublin. One of his daughters, his youngest daughter. Rosemary's youngest daughter—my daughter, Rosemary. She just started in the autumn there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: Small world [unclear].

LEVINE: So—and when you look back on that period of seven years when you left and then—and then returned, h—do you think that made a big difference in your life?

BLACK: The seven years I spent in the States? Oh, it definitely did, yes. I mean, the friends that I made in the office there, one of them—as I say, one was a German and one was a Canadian. And one—where'd the other one come from? I'm trying to think. One was German, one Canadian. Yeah, and one of them was Irish but he—his people had been there for a long time. I mean, when we made friends there we didn't just look for Irish people or anything like that. People you met in the office were the ones [several words unclear]. That was it; that was the life.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: And that certainly did make a difference, I think. Yes, [several words unclear] set before in life, you know. You had a—a wider perspective of life you had. And certainly, I—I—I think it did make a difference to my life and my way of thought about various things.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: Get things in different perspective.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And did your brothers ever become citizens?

BLACK: Oh, yes. They both did.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: Oh, yes. Well, their attitude was the country gives you [unclear] that you should have some regard for it. Should have regard for the country that—that feeds you.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: They were happy with the way of life [unclear]. So it was common sense and fair.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. I suppose you would have become one yourself—

BLACK: If I had stayed, I would have, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: I think one should be [unclear] to the country that gives them a great way of life.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And do you visit? Do you go back to—

BLACK: Yes, I do.

LEVINE: —the U.S.?

BLACK: Yes, go back quite—quite often. We were in New Orleans two years ago. We've been back many times down the whole—in fact, down a good bit of the East Coast. We've been in Florida several times and San Francisco and Los Angeles and Las Vegas and even down to the Mexican border, Terijuana [PP].

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm.

BLACK: Which is a—quite a colorful past tale, interesting. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Well, do you have any desire to go back or are you—you content that this is where you're going to stay?

BLACK: Go back to stay, you mean?

LEVINE: Yeah.

BLACK: Well, I guess it's rather late in the life now to make a change like that. But if I had to go back, if circumstances made it advisable to do for some reason or other, I would be quite happy.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BLACK: I'd be quite happy to go to Florida, maybe the northern part of Florida. I wouldn't like to settle in one of these communes, one of these places, these different sections. They're all together. One's better than the other one so that conventional way of life—I don't think that I would like that. I wouldn't—I would like to go back. I don't want to be tied to any unit or

anything like that. I'd like to be free and flap my own wings. I don't think I would confirm very—very well, you know—confirm, rather, very well, you know, with that [unclear]—well, these little communities in certain [unclear] of Florida. You've got them all and I don't like the idea—I don't like at all the idea of segregation on age.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: I think that older people put others down. I think—I mean, it's just like people's age—I mean to say I think that people—most age groups like to get together. But I think in anything in life, that people never should look to—for their friends to be older than themselves, with all due respects. I mean, I'm getting on in years but I like to keep with people that are still active. That's—that's—that's—that's—that's—that's—that's [unclear] people going off into retirement homes, not put people off and have to go in out of sympathy for them. But one of the disadvantages out there, I think is that in these retirement homes, people with [unclear] and so on—[unclear] was in [unclear]. But it doesn't give them any—any hope left anyway in life. It doesn't let them see any more sunshine. If anything, it thinks [unclear] to [unclear] them down a bit.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BLACK: Of course, the con—the conversations is all about the past, everything. There's nothing but the present or the future. I think it's [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: Segregation, I don't think is a good thing, really, if it can be avoided. So that's my opinion on it at any rate.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

BLACK: But I mean, as far as retirement home goes, I mean there's no such thing as a super retirement home. There's no—I don't know of any. They all look pretty much the same, no matter where you go. I've seen them in the States. I've seen them here. I've seen them in different places. But that's life, isn't it?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: I suppose. It's easy putting something down but what do you put in its place, you know?

LEVINE: Is—do you think there's a difference in—in the way that elderly people are treated here versus in the United States?

BLACK: Well, I think that really is—I think there's more consideration. Well, there's more consideration for elderly people here and there in recent years. But I still think there's more consideration given to them there in the States, I think. For example, in Florida they get free cups of coffee. They get free transport. They get free this. The people are generous towards them and more considerate to them, I do think, really. I think they—I think they do. I don't think it at all. I know it's a fact. You can see it even in the shops in different areas. They get free coffee, McDonalds. They give them free transport on buses and so many things they get free, which opened my eyes [unclear] when we went. They said, "Oh, yeah. Don't pay. Here you got the coffee free. You don't pay unless [several words unclear]. You don't pay this. And you pay a half price." That type of thing that you don't see here. Yes.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-hmm.

BLACK: [coughs] Of course—

LEVINE: [unclear]

BLACK: —the country's big, of course. People say [unclear] Yankees [several words unclear]. But I mean, at the same time, they've [several words unclear] blow about. They built a new country, to people from all over Europe that weren't happy and weren't prosperous. I mean, they got it rough but [unclear] built a [unclear] nation there. Very big [several words unclear]. Something to blow about, they've got. No question about it. Got a lot to blow about.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BLACK: Yet, no perfection anywhere. But they certainly have—they built the biggest, greatest nation in the world. No question about it. So obvious.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: People say they got [unclear]. To some people, it [several words unclear]. They say they got people out of Europe that couldn't make out. But then another attitude is they got people out of Europe that have vigor and [unclear] and want a higher way of life and have pushed themselves. And people with some common sense with—with ideas and life that they wanted to improve and ambitions which they achieved. No question about it. So—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: That's my attitude to the way they look on the elderly people in the States.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And how is your life now? Now that you're retired and your children are grown and—

BLACK: Quite happy.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BLACK: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

BLACK: Everybody in life is supposed to have the sunshines and shadows. But we hadn't. We—we are lucky. We have had our—a good share of sunshine, not very many shadows. And we are quite happy [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BLACK: She is quite happy to do her own thing, take our holidays when we feel like it and so on. We have no complaints.

LEVINE: Okay.

BLACK: [chuckles] I'm—

LEVINE: Well, I want to thank you—

BLACK: [unclear]

LEVINE: —so much. This has been a wonderful interview. I'm so happy that you were willing to come and speak with me.

BLACK: Well, it's been a great pleasure, Doctor, indeed, to talk—talk—talk with you. I certainly am very glad you contacted me and I hope that you enjoy your trip while you're here again. And I think that's about it and I hope sometime we may have the opportunity to meet again [several words unclear] if you contact me.

LEVINE: Okay.

BLACK: [unclear] [chuckles]

LEVINE: Okay. Well, thank you very much and—

BLACK: My pleasure.

LEVINE: I'll be signing off now. I've been speaking with Desmond Black, who came to the United States in 1929 and returned in 1936. And today is March 12, 1998 and this is Janet Levine for the Ellis Island Immigration Museum signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]