KECK-100
FRANCES STENLAKE OAKLEY
BIRTH DATE: OCTOBER 29, 1907
INTERVIEW DATE: DECEMBER 11, 1985
RUNNING TIME: 1:00:00
INTERVIEWER: NANCY DALLETT
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ENGLAND, 1914
AGE 6
PASSAGE ON "THE MAURETANIA"

DALLETT: My name is Nancy Dallett and I'm speaking with Frances Oakley on Wednesday, December 11, 1985. We are beginning this interview at 10:50 AM and we're about to interview Mrs. Oakley about her immigration experience from England in 1914. This is the beginning of Interview Number 100, side one. Let's start back in the beginning of your story, and can you tell me where and when you were born.

OAKLEY: I was born in London, October 29, 1907.

DALLETT: And can you tell me a bit about your family, or what you

remember of life in London then.

OAKLEY: You know we start school early over there. I think I was three and a half or four when I first started school. I vividly remember that. Um, we had, uh, there was one large hall, and every morning the classes would come out and sit in front of their doors. And the governess sat at the end of the hall on sort of a dias. And then we would sing good morning and we'd sing, you know, songs and things. And she would give us orders for the day and we'd go back into our little classrooms. And I remember, uh, one in particular, art class. We each got a lump of gray clay, as I recall it. I guess I was about four then. And, uh, the teacher sat a teapot on her desk and said, "Now, make me a teapot." So we all sat there modeling teapots. I remember that. And my brother Ernie, he was younger than I, like two years, or so. He also was in school at the time. And, uh, we were living in the Camden Town area then. Eleven Street. And, uh, my grandmother and grandfather lived on, uh, King Street, Little King Street, which is now King's Plaza. Anyway, I can remember that was the time that suffergettes were going around smashing windows for votes for women. And we'd be walking along High Street and

we'd hear the police cars going and my mother would say, "They've smashed another window, Ernie. Go see if you can fins some work." And dad would say, "That's not my work. I am a--" He had worked for thirty years as an apprentice to earn his, as master carpenter, carpenter and joiner, he called it. He was also a cabinet maker. That was all part of his thirty years' training. So, um, his brother Frank, my uncle, had, we didn't know him. Uh, when mom and dad were married, uh, he was working in Nicaragua. He did this fine gold work on the ceilings of the hotels and all this beautiful fresco work. So we, I had never met, and neither had my mother. anyway, about 1913, I knew, uh, there was a lot of commotion going on and the two of us and mother, we moved down to South End, the seaside resort. And I remember dad coming up to say goodbye to us one Sunday and we walked through the fields and we picked a lot of bluebells down there through the wheat, and the poppies. I always loved those red poppies. I used to run through the wheatfields at South End and pick those red poppies. And every time I've gone back late I've seen those red poppies along the road and that's, anyway, dad came to us one Sunday and he hugged us and he was crying when he left. And I could never figure it out. And then I realized later we weren't

going to see him for a while. Because mom was working as a waitress, and we were in a place in South End. Then all of a sudden we went back to London and we stayed in grandfather's house on Little King Street in Camden Town. And a letter came from dad one day, and I remember grandfather saying to my mother, "You go now. Your husband needs yo. Don't wait any longer." So I guess somehow they got the fare together and we were booked to leave on the Mauretania on August, I guess August second.

DALLETT: How long had your, had your father, your father had come to America?

OAKLEY: He had come over in 1913, in June. He came over on the Philadelphia. It took him seven days, I think, to get there. Anyway--

DALLETT: And you weren't aware at that time that he had gone to America, or--

OAKLEY: No. I didn't understand why dad had gone somewhere, you know. He hadn't come back. And then, uh, all of a sudden there was this hustle and bustle. Oh, in the meantime, mom went to the hospital and my brother Frank was born. That was in December the 13th. And, uh, so he was a baby, dad wasn't there, we were living with grandma and grandfather. And

then, uh, I know, there was a lot of confusion. Mother said, "You're going to have to leave school now. We're going to America." Well, to that, it didn't mean anything to me at that time.

DALLETT: How old were you then?

OAKLEY: I was about six. Just about six, because in August we left. anyway, uh, we had pictures taken of the new baby to send to dad so he could see what his new son was like. That was the picture with grandmother. And then, um, we started to get things together. I had to leave school. So did my brother Ernie, and I remember one Sunday we all went to church and they had a, a service, and they all sang "God Be With You Till We Meet Again." And mother was crying, and so was everybody else. And, um, I remember those Christmas parties. Everybody brought their own mug to these Sunday school parties. And they put tea in your mug with your cake, and as you left they put an orange in your mug and everybody went home with their mug with an orange in it. I remember that, going down Little King Street with my mug and an orange. Anyway, we got back to August of 1914. It was, uh, they said, well, "Tonight you're going to leave, so you'd better sleep." Well, I couldn't sleep in the day. I'd never slept in the day. But, anyway, we all got dressed, we picked up our little bags. And I remember going out on the street, and the neighbors' windows were open. And I remember a lot of people saying, "Goodbye, good luck." As we came up the street all the neighbors were waving and they all came out, see. So, um--

DALLETT: Had you ever known any other people to go, to leave Camden Town like that?

OAKLEY: No. Not the way we left. anyway, um, we took a train from, uh, Victoria Station, the midnight train. That's why it was dark. It was midnight. And we got on the train with our little bags, and mother had a bag of lemon drops. She said, "Now, if you're thirsty have a lemon drop." (She laughs.) I can remember that. And the next morning we were in Liverpool. And I can remember going on board this big ship and we had a cabin that was on the deck below main deck. Now, years later, when I read the Lusitania, as they described it, we did not know at the time because that was a Cunard Line ship. The Lusitania and the Mauretania were built by the admiralty and, uh, I guess the object was in case of war or any other disturbance they could use those two ships. I remember reading about the big steel doors with big rivets in them on the Lusitania. The Mauretania had those same doors. Pardon me. Because I remember we had to go through those steel doors and I used to put my fingers on the big rivets, down the steps into the deck where our cabin was. Well, with us in the cabin was another lady and her son. They were going to Canada. We also met another lady with five children. She was Welch. And she was going out to Chicago, to her husband. So we became quite friendly. So the five little Welch children and my brother and I, we used to go up the stairs onto the main deck and run around the deck. And I remember the sailors. They had these

tin boxes of Players cigarettes and they used to give us the boxes and they showed us how to scale them out onto the water. And I remember that gray green water and the waves and the box would sort of wobble, wobble down, and I guess it was that day, or the next day, we were up on the deck sitting on a chair and somebody says, "Look at that funny little boat over there." There was a little boat off in the distance. And we all rushed to the rail and we're watching this little boat. That was, I guess, our second or third day out. And we must have been quite a few miles out in the ocean somewhere. And, uh, over the P.A. system came word, "All personnel please report to your senior officer. All passengers please report to your dining room." So we all packed up and went into the dining room and we sat there and I guess it was Chief Steward or someone in a uniform. He said, "Ladies and gentlemen, England is at was." My mother said to the Welch woman, I knew those Irish would do it one day." They said, "We are at war with Germany." Mother said, "Germany? The Kaiser and the King are cousins. What are we fighting Germany for?" Anyway, he said that, "We have no understanding of why, but England is at war. Now, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "there will be no lights on board the ship from now on. After dinner you all go to your cabins. The cabins will all be locked. There will be absolutely no light of any kind. All portholes will be sealed." And, at the time, they were all out on deck hammering, because she was wooden, they were hammering pie plates over the portholes. Every porthole had something nailed on it. Well, we went down to our cabin, this Canadian woman and her son, and mom and Ernie and me, we had the upper bunk. Mom and the baby had

the lower bunk. And after you, you know, having a son on the Missouri and the Iowa, and grandsons who served on the nuclear carriers. Uh, they had nothing to do with it, but the oil burners, there's always one boiler out that's being cleaned, going through the voids and cleaning the orifices. I remember my son telling me about the Missouri and Iowa, always one boiler. They'd throw their hat and go crawl in. When the hat was outside it meant somebody was in there, inside the boiler. Anyway, um, I used, by my bunk hey had that longitudinal thing on the Mauretania and the Lusitania, and I could hear the boilers start one after the other. I guess they were all going except one or two. And laying on my bunk I could hear ba-room, ba-room, ba-room, ba-room, and the ship would start to go. And then I remember laying up there. I could see the sky. And then I could see white, and then I could see pale green, dark green, dark green, dark green and black. And my little brother would fall out of the bunk to the floor and my mother'd pick him up. "Get back up there again!" So I'd pull him up, and the two of us would sit in our little bunk and we'd go and we'd see light, light, light, and then we'd see the sky and we'd see clouds. And the next thing we'd see the sky and then we'd see light green, light green, dark green, dark green, dark green and black and Ernie'd go off again. Finally mother said, "Get in here with me." So she had Ernie and the baby and her in the lower bunk, and I was alone in the upper bunk hanging on to the rail. 'Cause I knew every time it got black the ship was tilting. Anyway, that lasted, dinnertime they unlocked the doors, we could go out and get our dinner, right back into your cabin. And the next morning they unlocked the

doors and I remember we children, we couldn't get up there on deck any more, those doors were shut. They were locked, those big doors, so we were captive company. But we were running up and down the steps, you know, having a good time, even though we couldn't get on deck. And I remember some lady saying, "Children, please! People are ill here." Well, I know my own mother was seasick. Anyway, with the baby, and she was nursing the baby, you know. They never thought of bottles in those days. That was terrible. You didn't feed a baby from a bottle. anyway, um, I remember them screaming at us and we'd go back in and (?), and the head, and all the nurses are running around to all those sick people. And that lasted, I guess. I remember another day of the same thing and another night of the dame thing, and the next morning about the fourth day, because on that, the Mauretania held the record for, uh, Atlantic crossing. I think she did it in five days, which was unheard of in that time. So this was about the fourth day, or the fifth. The ship stopped. I woke up, I couldn't hear the boilers going any more and I couldn't, the ship wasn't rocking, and the doors to the deck were open. My mother said, "Thank the Lord." We go up the steps and we look out. Mother says, "That's not New York." And she said, "Where are we?" And one of the deckhands says, "You're in Halifax, Nova Scotia." See what the Mauretania had done. The U-boat was alongside of us, just about, half a mile off. What she did, when she put on all boilers, she was the fastest ship in the water, she shot ahead. See, I guess the U-boat was going to get us as we were heading for New York, they were going to get us. "Cause you know, those big liners with all the

lights, she was, you know, you've seen pictures what they look like out there. Anyway, evidently she was going to get us, so instead of that the Mauretania shot this way across the bow. We were in Halifax while they were looking for us over here. They couldn't see us in the dark, you see. They depended on visual contact in those days. There was no more radar. So he had outdistanced the U-boat, cut across her bow and headed for Halifax. So we weren't in New York, we were up there. Well, the first day, the first class passengers, they brought out lighters, the first class passengers went down, they were given a little picnic basket and the ship took them all over onto the dock. Back came the lighter full of, I guess, they were sort of the equivalent of the Canadian CB's. They were all navy men, all workmen, all in work clothes, and all their tools and everything. And they'd go up to the, and you could hear "Bang, bang, bang, bang." Well, that went on that day. And hen that night a whole lighters troop came aboard. I don't know if it was the Black Watch, but they were coming aboard with full battle gear. The next day second class passengers all went down. In the meantime, they're unloading luggage. They're dropping it down onto these big lighters and ferrying it over to the shore. And when we left England mom had some beautiful white, uh, sort of Alpaca wool blankets that were beautiful. She also had sets of Minton china that were priceless. They had all the roses and I remember the buds on the outside of the cups and dishes. And she had, now, my father's family, my grandmother was Emma Scott of the Scott's Emulsion people. They were seven boys and one girl in her family. She was the one girl. And when their people died there was a lot of money

from Scott's Emulsion, that was cod liver oil, emulsion. So we got in the habit, and grandfather pressed them also, he said, "You've got to give these children cod liver oil." So we used to buy this stuff, it was something else, it wasn't the white cod liver oil, it was sort of like a syrup, a karo type thing, but it was cod liver oil with syrup. And he had bought us a big five gallon jar and said to mom, "You take this to America with you because you don't know what you're going to have to feed those children when you get over there." So mother had wrapped this five gallon of cod liver oil, it was like a sticky, molasses type thing, in her white Alpaca wool blankets to keep it safe. Her Minton china was also wrapped in her blankets, in with the cod liver oil. And she said, "Oh, I pray they don't drop my box." See, she had this big box. Well, her box came down with her name right across it. It got to the second deck and BANG, they dropped it, right, because they only had a couple of ropes. And it slipped, crashed right down. She said, "There it goes, my blankets, cod liver oil, all my china." Anyway, that's the last we saw of that box. We were there about three days. The fourth day finally it was our turn to leave the ship. By that time the ship was full of troops. It was all soldiers. We were the last on board. So we finally went down the ladder. They handed us a little ham sandwich with mustard on. Two pieces of bread, a piece of ham and mustard. I guess that's all that was left. My mother said, "What kind of food is that to feed to children? They haven't eaten all day." So we went up with this little bag, I remember carrying my little sandwich, and we went over to the shore. We ended up in a railroad station. We sat there, turned back and

looked at the ship. Instead of the orange and the black it was all squiggly black and grey, and the soldiers were all over it. It was full of soldiers.. She left, as we sat there, as a troop ship, and she served for two wars a s a transport. Never was hit. She was so fast. In those days, the U-boats couldn't catch her. and anyway, um, that was the-- We sat there. Mother said, "I haven't eaten all day." She said, "Do you think you could try to buy us some milk or something for the baby? Could you get--" All I had was British pounds. So I remember going out of the railroad station, walking across the street, and I found a little grocery and I said, "Could I please buy some milk?" He says, "British money? We don't take it here." So I had to go back. And I said, "Mama, I can't spend the money. It's no good." She said, "Well, I'm not changing it to Canadian because I'm waiting till I get to New York, then I'll get American money for it." Anyway, we sat there for at least two days. All we had was water. We couldn't get food. We didn't have money for food. Finally, I guess it was about three or four days later. We were still in that railroad station. Mom was starving, the baby was starving, we were all hungry. Anyway, uh, they said, "All people, the rest of you are bound for New York. There is a train coming in. Now, you all go downstairs to the lower track. You'll see the train marked New York." Well, hallelujah. We went down and we got on the train, you know, we were used to British trains. and we got, it was the Third Avenue El. It was that cane back with the swing backs, you know, those cane chairs that they used to have, the cane. We got on board the train, and I remember mother sitting across with the baby and Ernie and I'm

sitting by myself on the other side. And I remember putting my head on the window sill and we slept that way, with my head banging the window sill. And we drove, we, it seemed that we rode most of the night. and finally, in the morning, uh, the train stopped. And a man in a railroad uniform came on and he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, we are now in the United States." And everybody said, "Hooray! Hallelujah!" He said, This is Buffalo." Now, we have to change trains. You see, the gauge of the railroad changed. We had a Canadian, now we had to change to a United States train. He said, "We'll be here about an hour. There's a restaurant in the station if any of you would like to get a meal, we have an hour." Well, up got everyone. They all went out. Mom was there. She said, "You hold the baby. I'm going to go find some food for us in the restaurant." Oh, he said, "You can also change your money." "That's what I'm waiting for." So I'm holding the baby. Ernie is over there. Mom got off the train. Uh, she said when she got in there, she met the Welsh woman and she said, uh, "Well, you left your children on board?" She says, "Of course, they were all on the train." So there were just the five Welsh children, me and my little brother and the baby, and I'm holding him. I guess it was about twenty, thirty minutes later there was a bump, and the train started to slowly roll out. And my brother Ernie says, "The train's moving!" I said, "Yes, I see it moving." "Where's my mommy? I don't know where mommy is." I said, "Ernie, it's all right. Mama will make it. Don't worry." Mom said she was in the restaurant. She had changed her money, she had dollar bills in her hand, and they waited on line. and she said she saw a man with these big cones.

Now, over in England they were small. He had an enormous ice cream cone. It was the regular size over here, but there they had the little ones, little toots. So anyway, uh, it was her, she said to the Welsh woman, "The train's moving. I hear it." And she said, "Don't be silly. They said we have an hour." Well, she said, it was her turn there at the counter. She said to the man, "Give me three of those things with the ice cream in it." So he gave her three cones. She said she handed him a bill with a ten on it. She said, "This must cover it." She grabbed the three, she ran outside, and the train was just pulling out of the yard. She ran down the station, she hooked on to the back of the observation deck of the last coach and swung herself aboard. And here I am sitting there with the baby and Ernie's crying because the train's pulling out of the yard. I know we were out of the yard. We had already past the station. And all of a sudden through the carriage comes five Welsh children and my mother with three ice cream cones. So we sat the five Welsh children with us and, you know, the two together, this way, and there wasn't a soul on that train. Just the luggage, eight children, and mom. And we each had a lick of the three ice cream cones. We rode in. We finally stopped in the afternoon. And the train stopped. And they opened the door and we got down. And here are all the baggagemen. They're unloading baggage. It was all stacked all along the tracks. And I remember getting out of the train and all I could see, as far as I could see, was railroad tracks, tracks, tracks. Johnston Avenue, Jersey City. I knew it later on when we came. I said, "That's where we got off the train." And I stepped over the tracks, over tracks, over tracks.

And then the baggage handler said to my mother, "Lady, where are all the people?" Well, mon turned on him. She was furious. Poor guy was only a baggage handler. She says, "You jolly well know where the people are. You left them all in Buffalo." Well, they took all the luggage and put us on a boat, over to the Battery. So that's the first glimpse I had of Liberty, from Johnston Avenue, Jersey City. She's sitting right off the end of the pier there. So we got on this little boat and went over to the Battery.

DALLETT: So your mother now had charge of the Welsh kids?

OAKLEY: Mom had eight children to take care of. Sure. So then, from the Battery, they took us on another boat with, uh, the department of, I guess it was the federal Department of Navigation. Back we came to Ellis Island. And I said, "We were here before, weren't we? We were right there, right across from the railroad station." Because Ellis Island's right alongside the railroad station. I said, "Why did we have to go there and then come back here?" She said, "I guess there's no way of getting here from there. You can't get here from there. You have to go that way to get over here." (She laughs.) That was our standing joke. Can't get there from here. We, and I remember the long lines, and I remember they took the five Welsh children away because they had no one with them. And they said to my mother, "Which are yours?" She said, "This one, this one and the baby are mine." They said, "Well, whose are these?" She said, "Well, their mother is up in Buffalo where you left all the rest of the people." They

put them in sort of a hospital wing or something till their mother could, they came in the next day, I remember. Well, anyway, I remember the long lines. What bothered me most were the eyes. They pulled down your eyes and look in your eyes, and they grabbed him. My mother said, "Don't you hurt this baby." You know, they were looking at the baby. They were looking for jaundice, like, yellow eyes. That's the first thing, jaundice. And, uh, oh, we went through line after line. Then we had interviews. I remember sitting on a bench while mother was in there answering questions. And then they said, "Well, you're clear now. If someone comes to get you--" Mother said, "Well, we can go stay in America but, uh, we have to wait for your Uncle Frank to come and get us." Dad had had a terrible accident, as I said before. And he was, they didn't expect him to live. He was pretty badly banged up. He was in St. Mary's Hospital, Hoboken. That's when grandfather said we had better come over at that time. Otherwise I guess we wouldn't have gotten over here. During the war we would have been down there. Anyway, Uncle Frank was living in Brooklyn. He was supposed to meet us at Ellis Island and take us to the rooming house in Hoboken where dad was staying at the time. They had released him from the hospital. He was on crutches. He had broken hips and things. Anyway, we didn't know what Uncle Frank looked like, and he had never seen my mother because she had married dad while he was in Nicaragua. Well, we went outside and I remember passing sort of a cage. And there were people outside. And I said to mon, "You know, that looks like the cage that was down on the bottom of the ship. There were people crying in there." They had rounded up all the German

nationals and put them in detention on the Mauretania. Now, we had seen them as we went through. And going through Ellis Island there was another spot out there on the docks and there were a lot of people and some of them were crying and some were just sitting. And I said, "Mom, why, are they the people on the ship?" She said, "I don't know." But she said, "Those people have to go home. They can't come into America because they either haven't got a job or they don't know anybody or there's something wrong with them. Maybe they're sick and they can't come in." So I remember seeing that. So we went outside and we sat along the side there on a bench waiting. Well, all that day we sat. Nobody came. So finally they, we went inside and they gave us something to eat. and we sat and ate. It was like a big, long table. Then we had little cots we laid down on. Next morning we got up. (She laughs.) We got washed and dressed and we went outside again. Now, I was wearing a white serge sailor suit. Ernie was wearing a dark blue serge sailor suit, and my mother was in a white serge sailor suit that dad, dad had asked his tailor to make for us, Mr. Harris, in London. So we were dressed in serge suits. We never knew how hot it was over here in the United States. (She laughs.) Anyway, we're sitting out there in the sun and mom says, "You know, this is a hot country." I realized it was hot. Anyway, about the second day mon said, "You know, there's a man walking around here in a Panama hat. I'm going to ask him if he is Frank." She says, "I'm sick of sitting here in this hot serge suit waiting for him." Anyway, finally this gentleman in the Panama hot got off the ferryboat and he's walking around. She said, "I beg your pardon, sir." He says, "Yes

ma'am?" She says, "Are you Frank?" He says, Are you Frances?" She says, "Yes!" She says, "I've been watching you pass us for two days." He was, uh, he didn't want to speak to a strange woman and he wasn't sure that it was mom. Finally he said, "Oh, yes." So finally we went in and said, my mother said, "My brother-in-law is here to take us all." Very well. Here are your papers. So they let us go with Uncle Frank. Well, we went back on the ferry boat over to the Battery. Then we got another ferry boat back again. You know, we crossed this river I don't know how many times . (She laughs.) And Miss Liberty sitting in the middle of it all. And we were in Hoboken. and we walked over and I remember going down First Street. And the dust and the heat. At that time there was a lot of horse manure in First Street, Hoboken. And it dried and blew in your face on a hot August day. I remember that was my first impression. Mother said, "Where are the lovely gardens that we get all these pictures from?" Well, anyway, that's how we came into the United States. We came in from Johnston Avenue, Jersey City. and that's when, the first time I saw Liberty was the back of her.

DALLETT: This is the end of side one of Interview Number 100 with Frances Oakley.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

DALLETT: This is the beginning of side two of Interview Number 100 with Frances Oakley. Tell me what happened. Did you Uncle Frank then reunite you with your father who was in the hospital?

OAKLEY: Yes. He took us to this rooming house and, uh, I rem,ember he rang the bell and dad came down on crutches. I was amazed to see him on crutches. He was a pretty spritely person. Anyway, we stayed in this rooming house. I think it was on Garden Street. I'm not sure. anyway, it was close to the, uh, Steven's Institute campus, as I recall. It was a row of brick houses with stoops all alike. The whole street was the same. And he had a room in the back. I guess it was about two rooms in the back, first floor. And they used to send me to the little corner delicatessen. I had to cross the street. I don't know what street it was. I had to cross the street and get to the little delicatessen. And dad said he used to save the ends of the hams for me so he said, "You go over there and you tell the man you've come for the piece of ham he saved for Mr. Stenlake." So I did. I walked over to the store. I had a quarter, I think, in my hand. And I said, uh, "I'm, Mr. Stenlake sent me to pick up the piece of ham you saved him." And he gave me this little end of ham, and I'd give him the quarter, and I'd go back across the road. But I never knew which house we lived in. They were all the same. And I used to walk up the street and say, "Now, what house do I go in today?" And I remember going up third, fourth, fifth house in. Up the steps I'd go, open the door, right to

the back. And I'd knock on the door. And the lady opened the door and I said, "Do I live here?" And she'd say, "No, little girl. You don't live here. Who are you?" I said, "Well, Frances Stenlake." She says, "Oh, you're the little English girl." She says, "Two more houses, and that's where you live, up there." So I'd go down the steps and I'd go in and I finally found the right house. The next time was the same. I never knew which house I lived in. So then, um, the next time I wouldn't take that house. I'd try another house. The same thing. "You don't live in this house." So finally, I finally got to know the right house. But then my mother would say, "Now, where are we going to live?" And dad would say, "Well, if you can find somewhere we'll do." He was on crutches for years with a broken hip. He never did work well again. But anyway--

DALLETT: So he couldn't be a carpenter?

OAKLEY: Well, at that time, yes. After that he did try. Um, mother would say, "Up there on the hill. That's where I want to live." So we had a friend of dad's, Mr. Long, he worked for the railroad, Delaware Lackawanna. And he said, "That's Jersey City up there on the hill." So my dad said, "Well, Jim, if you don't mind looking around I'd appreciate it." So I remember Mr. Long going up. He came back and said, "Well, I've found a little house. It's right up on the hill." And we moved up to 84 Cambridge Avenue, Jersey City. And that's where I started school, School Number 8. And my mother took us down there, Ernie and I and we went into the

principal's office to register. And over in England they called them standards. Now, when you start at three and a half to four years old by the time you're seven you're already finished about four years of schooling. I was in standard four, 4-E, I think they called it. Anyway, this was a strange country, strange people, strange ways. And the principal said, "What grade were you in?" I said, she looked at me, and I looked, and she says, "What grade were you in?" I says, "I wasn't in a grade." "You stupid child. What grade were you in?" "I don't know." If she had said standard I would have said 4-E. She said, "Oh, put her in 1-B, and put him in 1-A." I got into grade 1-B and I thought, "My golly, this is easy over here. They can't even tell the time." (They laugh.) "And they can't write their name and they don't know where they live." Well, I soon found out, I had already finished four years, this was my fifth year of school, and I was back in the first grade. Anyway, uh, I always sang a lot and, uh, I sang the Star Spangled Banner. Well, all I had to do was hear it once and I knew it. And the children didn't know it. And the teacher would say, "You come up here and you lead the class." So every morning I'd go up front and I'd lead in the Star Spangled Banner and salute the flag. In those days they would say, "I am a citizen of the United States and I pledge allegiance to the my flag." And I would say, "But I'm not a citizen yet. I'd be lying." I said that. But I would say, "I am--" And I'd leave it. Because I didn't want to lie. And then I'd say, "I pledge allegiance to flag of the United States of America." I would not say my flag, because it wasn't yet, you see. I had just come over. So every morning I'd get up front and lead

the assembly in the "Oh say can you see by the dawn's early light." I never knew what it meant until later, you know. Anyway, that was the first grade. I got through fabulously. I think I just skimmed through those first four years of school. And then that, I went, we moved from Cambridge Avenue. I remember the first Christmas there. We didn't have anything. We had no furniture. Dad was on crutches. He wasn't working. I think he was on some sort of compensation. He was trying to find some sort of a dye that they could put on silk ribbons. I remember him working so hard on all kinds of things to make dye. They had given him a job and paid him a small salary. We were living in 84 Cambridge Avenue. And the owner was a school teacher, Miss Waterman. And I remember Christmas Day she had come in. We had one chair at the time. Dad made a table, first thing he did. He built a table that swung up from the kitchen window, and we would open that little table, and that was our first furniture. We sat on boxes. I remember Miss Waterman coming over Christmas Eve and, uh, at that time we had one dining room chair. She brought her mother and dad dragged out that one chair and sat it down for Mrs. Waterman, but Miss Waterman had to sit on a box like the rest of us. And she had gifts for us. And we had never seen these gifts. She had a big book for me. Chatterwell Stories, it was called. And I read that book for years. Ernie she had a little, one of those, uh, circus where you stick the little clowns on the rungs and things. And he was thrilled with that. And she had something for the baby, a little rattle. And I thought that was so nice. And dad said it was so nice of her to come and give us gifts. That was our first Christmas. And we had no

blankets. We couldn't sleep--

DALLETT: Did you ever see the, the, uh, things that your mother had packed up and--

OAKLEY: Oh, it finally came around November. They finally delivered the box, everything. Her blankets were full of broken china and cod liver oil. And, of course, all we had was cold water. We didn't have anything there, no way of heating water, only pots on the stove. She tried to wash her blankets, but by that time it was winter, freezing out there and, uh, they were a mess. We did have them for a while, but her blankets were never the same. And her Minton china was all smashed. I think she had two or three pieces. Of course we never did get the cod liver oil to supplement our diet over here which was mostly bread, because mom mad most of the bread herself. At those days there was no help for anyone. You had to be a regular customer of the poorhouse before you got anything, and that's one thing we never were. And mom used to make bread, and she make these cakes with water. "Cause we never had eggs, we didn't have milk. I remember in school saying, "Now, you children should drink at least a quart of milk a day to keep your bones strong." Well, we couldn't afford milk. We never had milk. Mother would buy a pint of milk. That was for Mr. Long's tea, because he came and stayed with us to help pay the rent. And we stayed in that little house on Cambridge Avenue till the rent got too much, we couldn't afford it any more. We moved to Patterson Plank Road,

overlooking the Hudson and Hoboken and New York skyline. We were over on Patterson Plan Road, up in the attic there. I think it was much cheaper there. And we could see the Metropolitan Insurance Company clock, and that clock would flash the hours, flash the red light, and it flashed white. When it went white it meant it was an hour. And mother would say, "I think this clock has gone. Children, tell me when the clock comes on, when it's the right time." So we'd all lean over the window and we'd watch and we'd say, "Okay, mom. The light's on." "All right. Tell me what time." We'd count, "One, two three, four, it's four o'clock," or "It's five o'clock." So she'd set her clock by the Metropolitan clock. I don't think they ever knew that. They were sending over, to Jersey City, the time. We would watch the Metropolitan Insurance Company clock. You know, it's still there. I still look at that clock. I remember. And from there we moved, uh, where did we go from Palisade Avenue? Oh, then dad had a place on Palisade Avenue that he bought and, uh, we were paying, it was a rooming house and we all moved down to Palisade Avenue. And then I went from, uh, number, oh, I went from Number 8 school to 28. I stayed at, and worked, I went to school, 28 School, when we were in Patterson Plank Road, walking up the hill. I went to Number 7 school, which is now a condominium. That's at Congress Street and Central Avenue. Do we have time? I used to walk home every day down Congress Street to Patterson Plank Road for lunch. At the corner of Patterson Plank Road and Congress Street was the Pathe Studios and Pearl White was filming Perils of Pauline. And I would come down the hill and on the corner, behind the gates, were all these people with green faces. They

wore green makeup because it would come out white on the film. Well, I'd never seen all these green people, and I'd go down over to have my lunch. I'd come back, and there would be all kinds of things in the yard there, over Patterson Plank Road. For instance, one time they had a balloon up in a, in a big frame, they had this balloon, and they had a basket hanging under it and about, piles of mattresses, all up, just onto the bottom of the basket. And Pearl White would be in there, and there would be a man with a moustache wrestling with her. And I would see all this on the way to school. And she'd be, oh, (she moves mouth), you know, screaming. Of course, it was all silent movies. And he'd be pushing her out. And I remember seeing her topple out of the basket and land on those mattresses, you see. When it came out in the movie here was this little dummy coming down, down and down, and they you'd see poor Pearl White laying down. Well, I, another time there was an apartment house going up Palisade Avenue and Congress Street. And I had a friend, Dorothy Britton, who was the first Miss, Miss Universe or something. She was in my class. And she lived next door. And I remember coming down the, down Congress Street and seeing Dorothy's house is on fire. All this yellow smoke was pouring out of it. But it wasn't. It was the next door house, it was the corner house. And Pearl White's hanging out the window in the middle of all this yellow smoke going, (moves mouth). And there was another man pushing her out the window in the smoke. This was all <u>"Perils of Pauline"</u>, the apartment house. I remember those days very vividly.

DALLETT: Did your mother continue with some of the English traditions?

OAKLEY: You mean plum puddings? Oh, always we had plum pudding at Christmas whenever we could buy the ingredients, yes. The suet we saved for suet puddings. She mad a lot of suet puddings with raisins, things like that, and steamed puddings. And, um, dad, of course. he went back to his trade, but all he could get was carpenter work, roofing work, things like that. But he mortgaged the house on Palisade, after we had moved to Palisade Avenue. A friend of his, a young man he had helping him, said, "You know, they're building houses out in Bergen County, in Englewood and all around there. And all we need is to get enough money to buy the materials." Because dad could build a house from a hole. He dug his own foundation and he built it all by hand. Mitred corners, pegged or, never a nail. Because that was his job, cabinet maker. Um, dad got a mortgage on our house. He bought two lots in West Englewood and, uh, Eldridge Street and I forgot the name of the other street. My sister would know it. Someplace. He built three houses, mortgaged to the hilt. Beautiful little houses. I remember the staircases. And then he couldn't sell them. He sat out there day after day. I used to go with him Sundays. And even back then, that was in the twenties, there was an awful lot of racial hatred. Dad was small, he had black hair. He had the brightest blue eyes you ever saw, and he had a little red moustache and it was red, because red runs in the family. My sister and my brother both have red hair. He would sit out

there with his house for sale, two houses on Eldridge Street and one over on Enwood Place, somewhere like that. And people would come in and look at the houses. They'd look around, because there were houses across the street for sale. Finally someone said to him, "Mr. Stenlake, you know why you never sold your house? Those men over there said, 'Don't buy off that little Jew." Now, he was not a Jew but he looked like one, I guess, being short with the black hair. And he said, that's the only thing. He went bankrupt. In those days, of course, I was working for a law firm at that time. And, uh, Magnetic Savings and Loan was here. And the people, instead of going through the foreclosure process they would hand the deed. And I said, "Dad, the money's gone, your houses are all gone, you've got nothing left. Just hand the deed in to Mr. Burrow." Which he did. Gave me the deed, and I handed it. I said, "Well, that's it." So then they had to move out of their house and they had a, they found a place down here on Princeton Avenue. Dad was working odd jobs with roofing, but he always had trouble with that broken hip. It seems he laid for three days without the hip being set. He had on his thing that he was British. Down in St. Mary's there the doctor was called Dr. Zumlof. [PH] I guess he saw he was of British ancestry. At that time the war had just started. (She laughs.) He laid for three days without anything. I guess he was black and blue and covered in kreosote. He had gone through the roof of a burned out factory in Hoboken and landed on a pile of machinery in the basement and, uh, he said he remembers the nuns coming over and bathing his head and bathing him. And finally one nun said, "Mr. Stenlake, you're a white man." He said, "Yes."

She says, "They have you down as black." He said, "No. I'm white." He said, "I'm just covered in kreosote and I'm bruised from head to toe." The nun discovered him as being white. So that the next day he went to the operating room and they tried to set the hip, but it had joined that way. He said, "You see?" Even in those, 1914, he was black, so they let him lay. And he always had that short leg and it pained him so terribly anytime it was bad. He used to walk the railroad tracks. Up the, he had a job at Journal Square at the time at the PATH entrance to the tubes. And he was up on the roof, and he used to do church roofs and things and he would climb around up there. That's the only work he could get. And he was up on the roof, he finished the roof, he was up on the, above the front door, the little thing, and his leg would give way on him every once in a while. It was a very cold, freezing day. And he walked the tracks, walked all the way, Journal Square, walked because he didn't have the fare. And he was to get paid that day. And he said to mom, "I'll have a hundred dollars in my pocket. The roof job is done today." Well, he had a helper up there and he say, "Watch your step, now!" And all of a sudden he said, "Henry, I'm gone." And he said, "What did you say?" And he looked and dad was lying on the sidewalk. So he clambered down and he went down and he said dad was laying there. So he ran in the house and he said, "You'd better call an ambulance. Mr. Stenlake just slipped off the, just the front door, that's all." So the man went out with a pillow and out it under his head and he lay there on a sidewalk. Finally the ambulance came and said, "He's dead. We can't take him in the ambulance. You've got to get the morgue wagon."

They brought the morgue wagon in and put dad in it. Well, mother at the time was taking my two children out for the day and just as she was getting in the car a police car came up and said, uh, "Are you Stenlake?" And my sister said, "Yes." She said, "Well, Alfred--" "Who's he?" She said, "That's my father." He said, "Well, he's dead. You have to go get him from the morgue." Well, mother was just devastated, because that was the day she was supposed to have money. And we went over, my sister called me, I called my husband. He went down and identified dad. And one had finally, John Elburke [PH], we called John Elburke [PH], he was a neighbor, a friend of ours, he sued to go to the same church. He said, "you know, your dad must have had a terrible fall." "Why?" He said, "The back of his head is gone, his eye is gone." He said, "He's cut to ribbons." I said, "Well, according to Henry, dad's lying there, he had a white pillow under him, there was nothing there." Well, you could see, and Mr. Elburke says, "I can't stop the oozing." You could see the wadding, all with blood oozing out. That was the autopsy, down at Scattorcio's Morgue. They had cut him to bits and left him that way. Mom, she took one look and she says, "His eye is out. He must have had a terrible fall." I wouldn't tell her that he was laying on a white pillow. And Mr. Elburke had put a marble in there and the marble had slipped, you know. She said, "There's one eye missing there." So it was pretty horrible in those days. Anyway--

DALLETT: Had he, when had he become a citizen?

OAKLEY: Oh, he became a citizen when I was seventeen. Dad was the first to file. Because it took eight years. You got your, first you got, three years, you got your first papers. Then you waited five years to get your second papers. Then he got his second, he went to the courthouse. I was seventeen, working at Five Corners at the time. And he had listed, and I still had it. I got my own citizenship later, I had my derivative citizenship. But at that time he listed me, I was seventeen, Ernie was fifteen, he put down Frank, because he was born over there. Frank was younger. And he put down my sister who was born here, but he didn't want to leave her out. So she's listed on his citizenship papers. We tell her, "You're a double citizen. You're a native and you've also been naturalized." He put her down, so he had the whole four on his citizenship papers. So then later on, of course, when I was working in Newark, I got my own citizenship, because I needed a passport and we couldn't keep handing dad's papers around, you see. Then mother had to get her own. She got her own a year later. She was the year after dad. And she says, "You know, I feel terrible about disowning allegiance to all my family and friends." He says, "Look, you're living here now, I'm working here now, forget about the King and everyone over there." Because she had brothers and sisters all in the Army and the armed forces. Mom and dad was still over there, her mother and father. But she was a citizen after we were, a year later. But we were all on dad's papers. So it was really funny. That's how we all became citizens.

DALLETT: And how many years was it before you, as a little girl, felt like you had become indoctrinated into the American way?

OAKLEY: I think the first year or so after I got to know the terminology of things and people stopped laughing at me and my British accent, because I had a London accent at that time. But I got to change things around a lot and I would say to them, uh, "Dasn't do this." I said, "What's dasn't?" "I dasn't do it." And I said, "I don't know what you mean." "My mama hit me if I did it." I said, "Oh, you mean, you are not allowed to do it. I must not do it." "Yeah, dasn't do it." I used to say I don't know that word. You must not, you cannot. Things like that, little terminologies. I got to learn all these things. And we had a neighbor who was very nice. I learned to embroider and crochet with the girls, and they would teach me different words that were different, you know. It was very nice, ice skating and things like that which I never did over there. We never had ice skating.

DALLETT: Was it, was it real different, uh--

OAKLEY: It was different.

DALLETT; Besides the climate and--

OAKLEY: The climate was very hot. We got rid of our hot wool

clothes, uh, and, uh, we'd finally become, you know, you become acclimated to it now, of course. There was nothing, now we know. Because over there you wore the same clothes year 'round. There's no summer wardrobe and winter wardrobe like we have here. So, anyway, of course, it's not as damp as it is. It's dry here a lot of times. And, uh, oh, I think after one year I was-- First Thanksgiving was a riot. In those days the children used to dress and go around in their costumes on Thanksgiving and we didn't know it was Thanksgiving. We knew it was a holiday from school. It was a Thursday. We were all off from school. And I was in the front garden there on Cambridge Avenue. We heard all horns going blah, blah, blah. The children came in with these costumes on and, uh, my mother called her neighbor and she said, "Mrs. (?), why are these children dressed up coming around blowing horns?" She said, "Well, it's Thanksgiving. You're supposed to do that on Thanksgiving. You're supposed to give them something." Mom says, "Well, I made some cakes. I'll give them a cake." And she gave them cupcakes. And then, pardon me. She finally, she said, "The children should have something." So mom gave me, I remember, we each had a penny. She said, "Now you take Ernie down to the shop at the corner and buy him something, buy him something for Thanksgiving." So I went into the candy store and the man was very nice. He said, "You little english children are so polite. You always say please and thank you and you're very, very nice children." So I went in and I said, "I have two pennies." I said, "Can I get something?" He said, "Yes, you can have a little--" They had these little paper horns that big. They were a penny each. He said, "You can

have the little paper horns." So I bought two little paper horns with my two pennies and Ernie and I went up the street going. "Blah, blah." That was the first thing we had heard of this dressing up for Thanksgiving. We all went to church for Harvest home. That was it. Anyway, that was our first Thanksgiving. That was funny. After that we used to swap clothes. My younger sister and my brother would change their clothes and he'd go out in her shirt and her beret and, uh, carrying a little bag . And she would go out in his pants and shirt and with a cap. And never these fancy costumes they have to have today.

DALLETT: So you then settled here in Jersey City and raised your family here?

OAKLEY: Yes. We stayed here after I met my husband singing in the church choir. We moved to Greenville down here. Then when dad lost his house on Palisade Avenue they found a floor down here on Princeton Avenue and that's where they moved down to. So I've been here ever since.

DALLETT: And your husband, was he, did he, uh, was he English, or--

OAKLEY: No, he was, he was of English stock. His grandparents were from England. Uh, his mother and dad were both born here and he was born here in Jersey City. Uh, and, uh, he was an American. He was, what, second generation, I guess. And, uh, he was an accountant and he worked for

Goodbody and Company and Shearson Hammill, at that time Shearson Hammill. Well, we were to be married in, uh, October of 1929 and I had been giving him money and he had been saving money and he had been buying stock on margin. October 29th, 29th was my birthday, the day the market crashed. He never came home. I didn't see him for a week. He said, "We've lost everything, we owe money to Shearson. The stock I got on margin is gone. We have no money left. I don't know what we're going to do." I said, "Well, I have four hundred dollars in Commercial Trust Company at the Five Corners. We're going to get married on that." (She laughs.) Well, we had to give up anywhere we were going to live. We had to live in dad's house for a while. He said, he slept on his desk, because at that time the accountants were all working on these long benches, and it was all by hand. He said he couldn't get to a phone. Every phone had been tied up. He couldn't tell us to sell my stock. He said, "I tried and I tried." There wasn't a phone available. So by the time he ended up he owed Goodbody and Shearson money. But we had lost everything. But, uh, we got married anyway and spent my four hundred dollars. I think I had a hundred left. Uh, we got a little place over on Liberty Park, but in the meantime my first baby was born and that cost me sixty dollars, no, ninety dollars, because I had gone to a sanitarium. Margaret Hague Maternity Hospital opened that month, when my daughter was born, October, 1930. And, uh, I had, couldn't get there because, uh, I had already made arrangements with the sanitarium. So when my second child, my son, was born in '32, um, Margaret Hague was open. And I had gone to the clinic, and he was born. That was sixty dollars for

the whole thing, for the nine months and the ten days in the hospital, the best of care there was. All over the world, Dr. Cosgrove would be bringing these doctors in, they spoke languages. This was a beautiful hospital. And I remember going to the clinic. And Bill had gotten work. The church had given all the young men of the church two week's work repairing the roof. They got twenty-five dollars a week for two weeks, all the young men of the church. Bill had worked there. The first week he brought home his twenty-five dollars. I took ten of it with me to the clinic, and I paid ten dollars on account of my baby, see. It was sixty dollars it was going to cost me. The second week he came back with twenty-five dollars and I took another ten dollars and I gave it to the clinic the second week. But that was it. When the baby was born in September 26, '32, I had paid twenty dollars on account of the sixty. So after the ten days of lying in at the hospital they came around and said, "Mrs. Oakley, is your husband working?" I said, "No, he's not working." And they said, "Well, all right. You're still forty dollars due. Pay it when you can, when he gets work." They gave me a clean bill of health. I had a receipt, a bill, for the baby. We got in the car and went home. I got, oh, I had to go by bus. We didn't own a car. And they never bothered me for that forty dollars. So I say to my son, "Arthur, you only cost me twenty dollars." But those were the days of Mayor Hague. Everyone who needed it got it.

DALLETT: Let me just ask you this one final question. Do you have any of the original papers, uh, from when you came

to this country, ship tickets, or?

OAKLEY: No, I really don't. My own naturalization would sight dad's number, his certificate, but that's all I have. Mom would have them. But, uh, mom was naturalized in the Court of Common Pleas in Hudson County by Judge Meaney, and when the attorney I worked for at Journal Square was named to the federal bench by President Kennedy we went out to Newark in '61, I met Judge Meaney. And the first thing I said to him was, "Judge Meaney, you naturalized my mother." He says, Hallelujah." He was quite a person. I loved him. He was a great man.

DALLETT: Thank you very much for all the details you could share with us. And that is the end of Interview Number 100.