

KECK-138

ELLA DOWLEYNE

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BARBADOS, 1907

AGE 15

DALLETT: My name is Nancy Dallett and I'm speaking with Ella Dowleyne, on Wednesday, May 21st, 1986. We're beginning this interview at 10:30 AM and we're about to interview Mrs. Ella Dowleyne about her immigration experience from Barbados in 1907. This is the beginning of side one of Interview Number 138. Let's start at the beginning of your story, and could you tell me where and when you were born?

DOWLEYNE: February 14, 1892.

DALLETT: 1892.

DOWLEYNE: Yes, St. Valentine's Day. (They laugh.)

DALLETT: And where was it you were born?

DOWLEYNE: Barbados.

DALLETT: In Barbados. Do you remember life as a child in Barbados?

DOWLEYNE: Oh yes, can never forget. (They laugh.)

DALLETT: Can you tell me a bit about your family?

DOWLEYNE: Well, what must I say, I was brought up in a Christian home, and my sister was here and she wanted me with her, so she sent for me, and my mother consented.

DALLETT: How many children were there in the family, in your family?

DOWLEYNE: Four.

DALLETT: Four children. And were they older than you or younger,

your sister was obviously older.

DOWLEYNE: One was younger, that picture of that one.

DALLETT: A brother?

DOWLEYNE: Yes, he was mugged in New York, so he's dead now.

DALLETT: So you had two older sisters?

DOWLEYNE: No, one, one, the one that sent for me, and two boys.

DALLETT: How old were you when your sister came to this country,
do you remember her leaving home?

DOWLEYNE: Yes, she came, let me see, she got married in '22. she
came here around '19. somewhere around there.

DALLETT: 1919.

DOWLEYNE: Yeah.

DALLETT: And uh--not 1919 (someone speaks off-mike) no, she came

around 1905--

DOWLEYNE: I came in 1907, yes she came two years before, so 1905, around that. That's right. Correction.

DALLETT: Tell me a bit about your parents, your mother and father.

DOWLEYNE: Well, they gave me a good training, yes, and I appreciated all that they had done for me so that when they asked me if I wanted to come to my sister, I gladly said yes, so they consented.

DALLETT: Was it very common then for people to come to the United States back at that time?

DOWLEYNE: No, not many, not many, no.

DALLETT: So you weren't used to saying, "goodbye" to people who were coming to this country?

DOWLEYNE: No, no, very seldom, very seldom.

DALLETT: Do you remember what your sister would have told you, I

guess in letters, about what life was like in this country?

DOWLEYNE" No, she never made mention of it, she knew she could take care of me. (She laughs.)

DALLETT: So she wanted to have you with her, and your mother thought that would be okay, and your father?

DOWLEYNE: Yes, yes.

DALLETT: Can you tell me about when the time came for you to pack up and go, do you remember that day?

DOWLEYNE: Oh yeah, very well, very well.

DALLETT: What happened, how did that feel when you were packed up and ready to leave?

DOWLEYNE: Well, I was a little bit sad but I mae (?) to it.

DALLETT: Were you excited about it or frightened, or--

DOWLEYNE: No, I kept very calm, my grandmother came to the gate,

and of course, I slept with my grandmother for all the years that I knew myself, so naturally she felt badly, but yet she was contented.

DALLETT: Did she send you off with something special, did she give you a little something on that day that you left?

DOWLEYNE: Only a prayer--

DALLETT: A prayer.

DOWLEYNE: Only a prayer, that God would take care of me.

DALLETT: Do you remember, how did you get from home to, where were you going to get the boat?

DOWLEYNE: In Bridgetown.

DALLETT: Bridgetown.

DOWLEYNE: Yeah.

DALLETT: Do you remember what you packed up with you that day, and what your parents--

DOWLEYNE: Oh, my clothing, my clothing. It didn't take very long.

It was Sunday too, and the boat was a little late in getting in, so I slept at the Christian Mission Home, they had a home in Barbados, in Bridgetown, Christian Mission, so I was put up there for the night.

And the next morning the others went back home but I remained. They wished me goodbye and said, "Well, if the boat comes and we're not around, we're saying goodbye now." So, we parted then. But the boat came in during the night, so we sailed early Monday morning.

DALLETT: What was the name of the boat? Do you remember?

DOWLEYNE: The Verdi, as far as I can remember. It was either the Verdi or the Valdrum (?) but I think it was the Verdi.

DALLETT: Do you remember anything about the trip itself, about the boat ride?

DOWLEYNE: Yes, it was pleasant and interesting, I enjoyed it. Took about, took about twelve or fourteen days, 'cause at that time we had no planes, not a lot of conveniences so we had to travel by boat, such

waves, I've never seen.

DALLETT: Had you met some people at the Mission, did you become friendly with some people before you got on the boat?

DOWLEYNE: Yes, yes.

DALLETT: So you weren't all alone?

DOWLEYNE: No, not at all. (Someone speaks off-mike) Yes, well I don't know exactly the people but my mother had left me in their care and I left from there, they took me to the Mission Home and they put me up at the Mission Home until, this is Sunday afternoon, because the boat was late in coming in. And the boat came during the night and we sailed early the next morning, Monday morning. I cannot remember the exact date, but I know it was late in June.

DALLETT: It was 1907, that you came?

DOWLEYNE: 1907, yes. So, when we docked here then and I saw other passengers getting off, and I was kept there, I wondered why. But then I was told that I very young and would not be given up to my sister until they went

through some proceedings. And at that time the passage was twenty-five dollars. That's right. So I was kept on the boat while the others came off, and I was put among all kinds of people.

DALLETT: On the boat?

DOWLEYNE: Yes. They couldn't speak English, and I couldn't speak their language. So, early in the evening time, they led them then to where they were supposed to sleep, and they hesitated, they didn't want to leave me back, so they went to one of the head men and he gave this man a push and said, "You go on with the others." So I remained. So then I saw a lady there, and I said to her, "Well, I don't speak English," (someone speaks off-mike) "I don't speak a foreign language, I speak English, and they don't understand me, nor do I understand them, so I am going to ask you kindly if you could do something to put me by myself so I wouldn't be among that big group of people." And she said, "Well, I works at Ellis Island, but I lives in New York, and I'm off tonight, so I'll let you have my room." And she escorted me to her room, beautiful room. So early the next morning, when the first ferry came in from New York to Ellis Island, she was on it, so she came and knocked at my door, and I told her, "Yes," I was up and all dressed, ready. So I, they took me then to the dining room. Well, I remained there for the whole day, and the man that was calling out the names

of the folks that was to meet their folks here, he didn't, he took too long to call my name, and I got a box, and I stood up on this box, and held up my hand. So, he laughed and he said, "All right, I'll call you by and by." So I waited, and he didn't call but on my way, after I came in contact with the lady, after she came and knocked at my door, so all this time I never saw my sister. And finally one day, I saw her. She was on one side of an iron gate and I was on the other side of an iron gate, and we could only wave, and kissed each other, other's hands. So the, I forgot to tell you that when my sister was coming home on the last ferry, when this lady was coming home to New York, that night, she got into a kind of conversation with my sister. And she said, "Do you know anything about a young girl that came in yesterday?" She said, "Yes, she's my sister." And she said, "Well, you're going to have a little trouble with her, I'm telling you, but I'll tell you what to do. Tomorrow, you bring your husband, and let him bring his bankbook, and that will settle things for you." So my sister thanked her and the next morning, bright and early, my sister was there with her husband. So I saw both of them at a distance then, and we waved, and it was very late in the day when I was called. So then we went into the judge's chamber, my sister, her husband, the judge, and I. So then the judge called up my husband, the judge called up my brother-in-law then, in front of him, and questioned him, and asked him if he was sure that he would take care of me here. So he said, "Yes, I'm capable of doing it." So I had no more trouble, so I came off like that, so I was here ever since then in 1907.

DALLETT: Do you remember anything about the, you said that you went into the dining hall, do you remember what you might have been fed there?

DOWLEYNE: Mostly, Irish stew. That was the main dish, and it really upset my stomach (they laugh) really, I couldn't eat it, I couldn't eat it. So one of the folks came over to me and said, "You have to eat something, you have to eat something." So I tried a few of the potatoes, and that carried me through. (they laugh.)

DALLETT: How about, would you remember breakfast that you might have had there, what they would have served you there?

DOWLEYNE: Yes, they served--they had a nice dining room, very nice dining room, very large. And one group of people, oh my goodness, I never saw so many people at one time in my life.

DALLETT: And they were coming from everywhere?

DOWLEYNE: Everywhere, everywhere, yes.

DALLETT: Do you, how did they control the people, did they let you know over a loud-speaker that it was time for a meal, or, how did you know where to go?

DOWLEYNE: They had a bell, they rang a bell, yeah, and then they would come around to see that everyone, those that were sitting around, that they would get up then and go to the dining hall to get something to eat.

DALLETT: So you were hearing a lot of languages?

DOWLEYNE: Oh many, many different languages, but I knew none.

DALLETT: Was that the first time you had heard these different languages?

DOWLEYNE: Yes. yes, the first time.

DALLETT: And what were the other people doing? You were fortunate enough to have a room to yourself that evening.

DOWLEYNE: I don't know, nor I didn't know where they were but I know they took them by themselves, and I was by myself.

DALLETT: Did you have to go through any kind of medical exam at Ellis Island?

DOWLEYNE: No.

DALLETT: Nothing at all?

DOWLEYNE: No.

DALLETT: On the boat before you came in or anything like that?

DOWLEYNE: No, I didn't have any, I had a medical examination before I left, oh yes. Before I left the Island.

DALLETT: But nothing at all on Ellis Island itself?

DOWLEYNE: No, no.

DALLETT: Do you remember, right before you came into Ellis Island, when you came into the harbor, did you see the Statue of Liberty then?

DOWLEYNE: Yes, surely, and when we got in I could hear the dogs barking along Bay Ridge Way because the boat was just going around, going around. And I knew it was Bay Ridge after I came here the, I knew it was Bay Ridge, I could hear the dogs barking.

DALLETT: And did the Statue of Liberty make any impression on the people on the boat, did you know to expect it or anything like that?

DOWLEYNE: No, I can't say that, no.

DALLETT: And so all in all, you had to spend the one evening, overnight.

DOWLEYNE: One evening, one night on Ellis Island, and that was really two full days, but one evening.

DALLETT: And when you had the hearing with the judge, he just basically wanted to know that your brother would take charge of you?

DOWLEYNE: Yes, my brother-in-law, yes.

DALLETT: And then at the end of the hearing, did he say, "Fine,

you're admitted?"

DOWLEYNE: Dismissed, yes, yes.

DALLETT: What happened after that? Did you then take the ferry back to New York City?

DOWLEYNE: Yes, straight to 123 Duffield Street, I'll never forget that number, (she laughs).

DALLETT: And that's where your sister and brother-in-law were living?

DOWLEYNE: Yeah, and two girls came in with me and they went to that same address because one was the landlady's niece and the other was the landlord's niece, but they, the very day I came and when I was kept, they were sent home because, they didn't keep them.

DALLETT: Oh, do you know why they let them come through?

DOWLEYNE: Because they were of age, they were of age.

DALLETT: And what age was that? You were sixteen, is that right?

DOWLEYNE: Yes, yes.

DALLETT: You had to be a few years older than that?

DOWLEYNE: Yes.

DALLETT: To come in on your own?

DOWLEYNE: Yes.

DALLETT: Do you remember when you first got settled here? What was different from life in Barbados?

DOWLEYNE: Well, everything, (she laughs), yes, yes.

DALLETT: Can you give me a few examples? Was it the food, or the styles, or the--

DOWLEYNE: Well, of course I lived with my sister. so we had regular home-cooking and sometimes we exchanged, and I enjoyed it all.

DALLETT: Were you enrolled in school then, when you got here?

DOWLEYNE: No, I went to Girls High, for a short time, on evenings, learning to sew. But then someone asked my sister if she would like me to have a little something to do. And she said, "Yes, if you know of anything that would suit her, I think she would accept it." So I did, so I made two dollars a week (she laughs).

DALLETT: And what did you do for the two dollars a week?

DOWLEYNE: Some of everything the lady had to do around the house. So she got me quite a few things that were strange to me.

DALLETT: Anything that you can remember that was strange then, back in the beginning?

DOWLEYNE: No, I can't say that I can--she was very nice and she taught me well, taught me well, I could only say that of her. And I've never forgotten their names, their names was Hoffman.

DALLETT: Hoffman. And was there a community of people who had come from Barbados, where your sister was now living?

DOWLEYNE: Not very many, not very many. Living was quite different. Everything was so much cheaper, of course, money was very scarce at that time. Living was very, very cheap. You could get a pound of butter for a quarter, and of course everything was different in a sense, because we had to heat by coals. Those that didn't have coals would buy wood. Life was somewhat different, and the weather was much colder than these days, I'm telling you, we passed through some cold winters, not like nowadays.

DALLETT: Was it hard for you to get used to the cold?

DOWLEYNE: No, I can't say so. When it got too cold and I was outside, I would run. (They laugh.)

DALLETT: Did others in your family come from Barbados, to this country?

DOWLEYNE: Oh yes, yes.

DALLETT: And how long after you had been settled here, did they come?

DOWLEYNE: Oh they began to come, sometimes one, sometimes two, and

gradually they increased just like from anywhere else, you know.

DALLETT: Did you go back to Barbados to visit your parents?

DOWLEYNE: Yes, of course.

DALLETT: And how did you feel having made that big change and moving here?

DOWLEYNE: Well, I made it. I went back and I stayed about, I stayed about three months and then I returned.

DALLETT: So did you feel after you had been there for three months, that you wanted to come back to this country?

DOWLEYNE: Yes, yes, I got adjusted.

DALLETT: So, you didn't feel, you became, you felt like you were becoming a part of this country, rather than wanting to go back home?

DOWLEYNE: Many times, yes I visited many times.

DALLETT: And could you describe how you think your life was different because you did come to this country, or do you think it would have gone somewhat the same, had you stayed in Barbados? Did it make a big change in your life to come here?

DOWLEYNE: I can't say that, I can't say that, because my living there was very happy, and I came, and I adjusted myself, I wasn't unhappy because I was with my sister, and my brother, my eldest brother.

DALLETT: How about your grandmother, did you miss her?

DOWLEYNE: Oh yes, and she passed, yes.

DALLETT: I think I've asked you everything I need to unless there's anything at all you'd like to add?

DOWLEYNE: No, I can't say that, I can't say there's anything to add. My life has gone on and I've lived a very contented life here, and everything had been very, very comfortable for me. Of course there were times when you would feel a little uncomfortable at times but nothing to, nothing to make you feel as though, "I'm going to pack up and go back."

DALLETT: You seem to be surrounded by many relatives and friends.

DOWLEYNE: Oh I have so many relatives, I can't count them, I'm telling you. And my nephews' wives, they're just like my real nieces. They're all very much interested in me. I can't number them, to tell you the truth. They gave me a ninetieth wedding anniversary, not wedding, ninetieth birthday anniversary, when I was ninety years old, and, oh, we had a blessed time together, quite a family.

DALLETT: And are there a lot in the next generation coming along?

DOWLEYNE: Oh, I should say so, I should say.

DALLETT: And are they involved in all different kinds of things, they're living here, near you?

DOWLEYNE: Oh yes, oh yes.

DALLETT: So you're involved with them?

DOWLEYNE: Some is in California, Chicago, last I heard a niece was in Albany, they're scattered here there and everywhere. I have a nephew that's a doctor. He has a daughter that is a doctor, she's in California.

DALLETT: A whole family of doctors.

DOWLEYNE: Yes, they're all doing nicely.

DALLETT: Okay, unless there's anything else you want to add.

DOWLEYNE: And Lorna, what is she now? (Someone speaks off-mike.)

And then my cousin there, she's retired now
two weeks ago. She was at the hospital for how long?
(Some one speaks off-mike and they all laugh.)

DALLETT: So there was somewhat of a transplanted community of
relatives and friends who came through around the same time?

DOWLEYNE: Yes. Very, very few blacks (someone speaks off-mike).

DALLETT: Very few blacks came to this area.

DOWLEYNE: Very few blacks when I came here first. Very few, You
would-- (Someone speaks off-mike.) There was something else I wanted to
make mention of--

DALLETT: Okay one second, we just want to flip the tape over. This is the end of side one of Interview Number 138 with Ella Dowleyne.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

DALLETT: This is the beginning of side two of Interview Number 138 with Mrs. Ella Dowleyne. Okay you were going to--

DOWLEYNE: I said there were very few blacks when I came. You would get on a trolley and you would only see two black people, that's all. And very few lived among, where we lived on Duffield Street, very few blacks. But as a rule, as a whole, very few blacks was around in those days. And the fare was reasonable. I've known I've walked all over Brooklyn Bridge to Park Row and back for a nickel, that's right, taking a walk. Now coming to my religious background. Churches were very scarce and the blacks, the few blacks that was here, couldn't enter the white churches. So after a while, they opened doors, I mean the blacks got their own places and so, but coming now to it, in Kansas City, that denomination. I read in the Christian Mission, they would send the Christian Mission Herald from Barbados here to the few that lived where I lived, to get an idea of the work that was going on. I read this paper and in this paper I saw, "May God

bless Brother Miller in the Atlantic Avenue Mission." And I said, "Well, Atlantic Avenue is not very far from Duffield Street." So I said to my brother, that one right there, I said, "Suppose we take a walk, on Atlantic Avenue, see if we can find that Mission, and if we'll be admitted." And he said, "Well, I'll walk down Atlantic Avenue down to the waterfront," and I said, "Well, I'll walk up then to Atlantic Avenue to the Long Island Depot."

So then I get back home, I saw him, and he said he didn't find it and I said I didn't find it. But we started again another time, and I walked up by the Long Island Depot and I found this Mission. But I wanted to know now whether I would be admitted or not, so I went home then and told the others, "I Found the church, it's the Atlantic Avenue Church and the denomination started in Kansas City and I don't know whether we will be admitted." So I made a try and sure enough, the minister, he was from, I think he was from Canada, I think it was. He gave me a very nice welcome. So I went home and told the others, "I don't think he will close the doors if we enter, so suppose we make a try." So some in the family started and we went in there and we saw a lady in there from St. Kitt's one black woman, and she was elderly because she soon returned to St. Kitt's after that. So I said, "We did try," and he gave us a hearty welcome, this minister, and time went on for just a short time and then it was a white church. They asked him then to let all those that came in, the black ones sit on one side and then let them sit on the other side. He said, "Oh no, I couldn't do that, as a minister. Christ died for all, black and white, I couldn't do that." And

they eventually left one by one, two by two, and it became then a black church altogether. And he remained as the minister. I'm sorry I haven't got his picture but it's down at the church. And he remained as our minister then until he passed, and he built up some work among the blacks. And that was in 1908, 'cause I came in 1907 and that was 1908, and I have been in the Nazarene from then until today. This is 1986. So now the Nazarene has a big black, what must I say, crowd. They have a number of churches around, well, that's how it came in, through this brother inviting the blacks to come in. From time to time now they'll open different churches and now they have a very large black community, and when they have the different conventions and so, why the blacks are right up there with the whites. They had one just two weeks ago today. (Someone speaks off-mike,)

DALLETT: So there was a long steady growth in the black community?

DOWLEYNE: Yes, yes, but now there are so many of the young ones that don't know anything about the history of it and they want to know why this, just this white picture is up there. So we reminded them that he was the founder, he was the one that started it. So it's only through him now that the younger ones, really, have entered the church, church's history, having Brother Miller as the founder of it. So I remembered the day he passed. My brother was the only one at his bedside. I remember that he,

they lived on Atlantic Avenue, himself and his wife. Usually, for some reason or other they like tent life, and he used to be in this tent. But anyway my brother was there with him, and while conversing, he said to my brother, "My heart has stopped," and he put his hand there and said, "No more," and that was the end. Oh but he, I'm telling you, he was something else, he was something else. And in the hospitals now, to visit your folks, you couldn't get in a hospital until Wednesdays and Sundays I think it was, for two hours. And if you had a sick there, you can't get in any other day.

But he will go everyday and come out and tell you how they're doing, and how he prayed with them and so on. And I remember that one of the Cox's had a sister. She passed one day while he was there, and he was the one that could go back and let the sister know that the other sister in the hospital had just passed. He was a dandy person to tell you the truth, we all loved him so, but Jesus loved him best.

DALLETT: Was the church also, did it serve as a community center in any way or was there a growth of a community center?

DOWLEYNE: Yes, I must say that, yes, I must say that. And now they have a number of Nazarene Churches and even in Manhattan. They have one now, recently, I can't remember his name, but he's well known, and his congregation, they just love to come over to our church. (Someone speaks off-mike.)

DALLETT: Has the church in Barbados, the music and the food, and has that been kept alive in the generations and in the community center and in the churches?

DOWLEYNE: Yes.

DALLETT: Yeah? Is it altered in some way?

DOWLEYNE: No, I think it's about the same, I think it's about the same.

DALLETT: So your feeling was it was kept alive and strong, and transplanted?

DOWLEYNE: True. (Someone speaks off-mike--discussion off microphone about regional food and a dish that Mrs. Dowleyne prepares.)

DALLETT: So you haven't passed on the recipes and the tradition, you're still doing it yourself? Can you tell me about that?

DOWLEYNE: And even the boys have married the girls now from down

south. These girls are crazy about it, so they all meet here on Saturdays.

It has okras, (slight interruption) it's made of okras, green okras, and we boil the okras, you know okras, very delicious. And then we put the cornmeal in it and stir it and then you have to stir it sharp that it doesn't get lumpy, and it comes out like a smooth paste and that's the dish, what they call the "calaloo." Well, now the "bacalao" is the codfish. We generally use it with the codfish and they all think it's a very delicious meal, and they all meet here on Saturdays.

DALLETT: Is this something you would have learned from your mother and grandmother?

DOWLEYNE: Well, I knew it over there, yes, yes. (Someone speaks off-mike.) Then the plain rice, sometimes they cook the peas and then put the rice in and cook that all together until it's all cooked and that's another delicious meal.

DALLETT: How about the music? Did you miss the music from the Island when you first came?

DOWLEYNE: No, you could do it here, do it here if you want to.

DALLETT: So there were people who played the same music and you

weren't homesick for that?

DOWLEYNE: No, no.

DALLETT: Anything about the culture being kept alive?

DOWLEYNE: (Someone off microphone makes lengthy comments.) Mostly
the guitars. It's surrounded by water you
know, yes, water all around, all around. And the beach
is so very, very nice, very nice, and the water very
blue and pretty. It's always advertised on TV. No
winter, no winter, And our cousin there knows a little
about it because I took her over once. Oh boy did she
had the time of her life (she laughs).

DALLETT: Okay I want to thank you very much.

DOWLEYNE: That's our story.

DALLETT: Thanks very much for telling it. That's the end of
side two and the end of Interview Number 138 with Mrs. Ella Dowleyne.