

KECK-90

REVEREND JOHN. H. EVANS

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CHAPLAIN AT ELLIS ISLAND

1946-1953

DANE: This is Debby Dane, and I'm speaking with Reverend John evans on Tuesday, November 26, 1985. We're beginning the interview at 11:10 AM. We are about to interview Reverend John Evans about his work experience as a chaplain on Ellis Island from 1946 to 1953. He is Interview Number 90. Reverend Evans, if you could tell me what brought you over to Ellis Island. What were you doing there?

EVANS: Well, I got involved on Ellis Island, uh, because, uh, it was one of the facets of the work of Seaman's Church Institute of New York which, at that time, was on 25 South Street, downtown, the Battery. The building no longer exists. I mean, but that's where the chaplains worked out

from and I was appointed the various kinds of work, and Ellis Island happened to be one of them.

DANE: And you were to go over and do what with the people at that point?

EVANS: Well, the, um, the, I'll have to give you a little bit of background as to how it was involved with the other rounds. A story of islands, in a way, because I was involved in ferry's so much, ferrying around. I was at the, I had a room at the Seaman's Church Institute and, uh, I'd been there a year or so, and they gave me another room at, uh, Marine Hospital, Staten Island. And the priest and myself, we covered this thousand bed hospital. And it took about a day for each floor, so, it, it was intensive work. When I was on Staten Island I had to take the ferry to the Battery, then get on the Ellis Island ferry and every Tuesday and Thursday I visited Ellis Island. And on Sunday morning the Seaman's Church Institute was interested in what the various chaplains were doing and they wanted to leave them free to be able to circulate in other parishes around the metropolitan area. So Bishop Donnegan [PH], he used his chaplains, including myself, around New York and New Jersey and Long Island, the immediate area, to talk about the work we were doing. So that's why we didn't have Sunday morning services at the Seaman's Church Institute. On Sunday afternoon, every Sunday afternoon, I had a service on Ellis Island at

four o'clock. And then, when that was over, I took the ferry to the Battery, got on the other ferry, and went to the, to the, uh, chapel in Marine Hospital and had a service over there. So I was on ferrys all the time.

DANE: So you lived on the water.

EVANS: Yes. I lived on, nickel ride, only five cents. And the ride to Ellis Island cost nothing. But it cost me one nickel, back and forth. I did a lot of writing and a lot of thinking and met a lot of people and talked to a lot of people. And people asked me as great many questions, what I was doing, why I was doing it, on the ferryboat.

DANE: Where, what did people think about Ellis Island at that point? The war was over, the immigration influx wasn't as great. It was mostly considered a detention center, wasn't it?

EVANS: That's all it was, a detention center. But i was told, when I first went over there, I should understand that the work was divided and on the left hand side of the island it's artificial, it's fill. And it's that side of the island which I was, be full time involved. On the right hand side of the island it was mostly detainee, you might say. And we had a full time woman worker appointed there from the city mission society,

sponsored by the Episcopal Church, appointed by the William, Reverend William Springer. And his appointment was Alice Palmer, and Alice Palmer was our full time, uh, church worker at the immigration part of Ellis Island. And so I worked with her a great deal and, of course, I met with her continuously, just about the people who would be sent from that side to the left hand side. They were sent to the left hand side when they had some kind of illness, because that was a hospital in itself. People don't realize it was a hospital. That's just about what it was. And, uh, some of our volunteers and our workers became ill, and I'd visit there in that little hospital many times. And my problem was how to overcome the language barriers and get to other people who were there. But mainly I was to serve people when they really had troubles. (He laughs.) You know, you're sick, or otherwise, and, uh, but the, uh, on Sunday afternoon anybody could come, and everybody was allowed to come. So they had a Christian Science service was first, the Roman Catholic service was second, and the Anglican service, which was my service, was the third. So most of people that went to the first, stayed right through all of them because they knew they were allowed to be there and it was something they could do, whether they believed in what your saying or not. As a result, I remember very well, they, uh, it was just a hall, of having it just jam full of people. I don't know when I've had such a consistently large congregation, so conglomerated. It isn't, it isn't that they were Christians of various kinds, but they were other people, Moslems and infidels and all kinds of people that I'd never

dreamed of evening of even knocking on the door of any kind of religious organization. So I had all conglomerated people. So we couldn't have communion very well, because we had to have more of a preaching thing, so, I talked heavily on Americanization, that kind of thing. Am I talking too much? I don't know.

DANE: No, this is perfect. Um, when you say you talked about Americanization, like what kind of topics, what would you discuss?

EVANS: Well, I was a little bit afraid because I knew that some people there who were detained who, for a very good reason, we had stowaways in there, we had people whose papers weren't really cleared. We had some very fine, intelligent, fine people. It was just a matter of, uh, of trying to get a foothold in this, in the country, even for a brief time, for a good reason. But if we couldn't have enough clarification, I had to be sure who was coming in and why, and so it was some interrogation was going on. So I felt duty bound to give some Americanization in this way. The country might look like it's a country of questions, but it's also a country of answers, and I tried to give them the idea about the people gone before through the Island and, uh, most of us are indebted to the Island and we all have friends and, uh, neighbors who are because of that and, and I try to give a positive picture of it so they would, when they did get into America, they'd forget all about the hard knocks of getting in here, appreciate how

different it is from some of the places they came from.

DANE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

EVANS: And I thought that was a kind of religion I could use when there was a mixture of religions. So I talked heavily one way or another about that and found Bible passages from the book of Micah and other places that would fit that kind of reference.

DANE: Uh-huh. Now, were these people, when you say stowaways, stowaways on boats that had come over?

EVANS: (He laughs.) Yeah, It's, they were a pretty tough lot. They had one section the called the Snake Pit, and not many people went in there. I was able to get in because I had hobbies they liked, and I was able to, to get through that way. That's how I--

DANE: Was it a room, the Snake Pit?

EVANS: I don't recall whether it was a room or whether it was a, uh, I had an idea it was kind of an under-(?), something or other. My memory's a little hazy about that. Some other, they might remember. It was, that was what they called it. I understand there were some DT's at one

time, and that was where they helped those people to get back to normal again.

DANE: Uh-huh.

EVANS: But I remember going in that situation once. I don't recall, what it was, it sounds like it might have been like an Edgar Allen Poe situation. And I remember it was kind of eerie. But I remember, I remember one thing. All they did was gamble. That's all they ever did. No matter how beautiful the weather was outside, it was, they used to stay gambling all the time. It might not have been for big money, or any money for that matter, it's just that they constantly gambled all the time. I really, I thought that was rather odd.

DANE: What nationality, were there all nationalities in the Snake Pit, or just a particular group.

EVANS: No, they were all, they seemed to me to be all nationalities, yes. And, uh, this is what it was called. and, uh, I remember going in, I just said, I forget what I went in there for, I think, maybe Alice Palmer sent me to talk to somebody, or something or other, and my memory's a little bit hazy, but I do remember that's what it was called. I remember I went there once.

DANE: And there'd be like twenty people, ten people?

EVANS: It was about a dozen, oh, about a dozen people or so.

Yeah, it was quite a few. I don't know whether they were all in the same boat, or whether just there for a game, but I remember the man that I went to see was, uh, a pretty stolid type. He, uh, was kind of hard, you know, no imagination, looks at you, it's like talking to a brick wall, I remember that, that part of the interview.

DANE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. And were you there to, did she want you to, how could you boost his spirits?

EVANS: No, my, my, I, as clergy, you have to out of all the, uh, all the, you know, the, uh, machinations, the machinations, I should say, about, uh, each person's own situation, why he's there. And they'll get at you. They'll try to let you in the seat and they'll all cling all over you and say, "Oh, please, I'm innocent," and do this and that and we never, I, and I was told not to ever get involved that way. My job was purely morale, purely morale, try to get, it's boring for them over there and it's, uh, it was definitely a morale place. And it was a little, the atmosphere was apt to be morose and it was, many times, over there.

DANE: Explain to me also, so they were stowaways, people that had been in this country and then found to be illegal were sent--

EVANS: I remember one person who was storming up and down, uh, Alice Palmer asked me to go see him, up and down the room, the room where he was detained. And, uh, he told me that he was a violinist, and he was over here to give a concert somewhere and his papers couldn't be cleared, and he kept calling everybody "trash." "What am I doing with all this trash around here?" Looking at the rest of us, I guess. He was right. He was a very dignified man and I felt sorry for him and I, what could I say? And luckily I know music a little bit so I, um, faked it a little bit, and told him I, I play violin and things like that. Of course, I really played fiddle, but I called it violin. And I more or less, after a while, I got him to calm down a little bit and, and, uh, you know, what else can you do. I mean, I can't get into the nitty gritty of the whys and wherefors. Clergy, at least the chaplains, are trained to really keep to their own sphere and not complicate matters.

DANE: Were there mostly men there, or were there women and children?

EVANS: There were women and children. Yes. One woman, I remember

very distinctly. Alice Palmer sent for me one time to talk to her. But she was a very heavyset person. I don't know if she was from, I think she said she was from behind the Iron Curtain. This I do know, but what country I don't remember. A rather heavyset woman. And I had an interpreter with me and, uh, see, she was biding time, wanting something to do. So, uh, I was familiar with the occupational therapy shop, that's why I was, see what I could suggest to her. And the interpreter, uh, you know, interpreted to her all the various things that I said she might be able to do in the occupational therapy shop. There was a dead silence, she said something, and then I said to the interpreter, "What did she say now?" She said, "Do you mean I can choose what I want to do?" Now, it was a simple statement, but I never forgot it. It made a tremendous impression on me. That long silence, as if she was expecting someone to come and spearhead her into a certain thing whether she liked it or not. She had a choice of things. I thought that was very enlightening. The first time I ever ran into anything quite like that.

DANE: Yeah, it says a lot.

EVANS: But I remember it very well.

DANE: And were there lots of people there, or just a couple of dozen, or--

EVANS: There weren't lots of people there. There was one young woman, I can remember very well, who had some kind of a mental problem. A fine looking woman, too. And, uh, I visited her a few times and, uh, it's difficult because we have to draw the line between what we should, we could, what we should discuss, what we should not. And I felt this was a little bit too, uh, too much for me. So what I did was try to be pleasant to her. But I was told, I could tell right away, she did have a, she definitely had mental problems of various kinds. And a very nice looking woman. I felt sorry, sorry for her. She had a lot of fears, things of that kind. And unfortunately, it's a short term thing. As I say, I was dreadfully busy. My schedule was hectic. And the other chaplains that I knew, every day. went from quarter of nine in the morning, quarter of ten at night. And this is year round, no vacation, no Thanksgiving, no Christmas. No such thing. It went year round. It was a very highly intensive work. Constantly. So, uh, a place the size of New York, all the people you have to see, and you have to track them down, you do feel a bit frustrated. I thought of that woman many times. I wished that somebody, you know, especially another woman, could have spent a lot of time with her.

DANE: How long do you suppose she was on the Island?

EVANS: She was there quite a while because, uh, because, uh, gee, I went back there for a visit, uh, a time later and behold she was walking around in a bathrobe or something. But she did look a little better. I remember that, that particular one. I'm trying to think of some other I might have remembered, but it'll probably come back to me after a while or something, but--

DANE: Were people moved through pretty quickly? Would they be there a couple of days, or weeks?

EVANS: Oh, yes, they tried to get them through. No, you didn't, there weren't many long term ones. They, you'd see, you wouldn't see. And this is the whole work, the whole work is a waterfront work. And it's coming and going is, uh, see morale's bug thing, and shipping wasn't good after the war and, uh, we'd thought we'd get the men together and have programs or sports or things like that. We couldn't do it, because they might be shipped out or go somewhere. There was a lot things we couldn't do with them, because they were so transient. And it was kind of frustrating to do things you'd like to do with them. There's an awful one-on-one. You'd get to know certain people and when they'd get in trouble, like, I had

to go to Tomb's Prison once in a while, I had to go to the Bronx, or out in St. Albans, Long Island. I was out on the subways and trains and buses and all kinds of things forever trying to track down just one person. Hectic life.

DANE: Now your, you forte, or the tool that you used on Ellis Island, particularly, was music, right?

EVANS: I am reasonably sure that's the reason they sent me over there. They could have appointed anybody. There were seven chaplains at that time who were working on the waterfront, more or less through the Seaman's Church Institute. And I was the youngest one. And, uh, I was the one who had the particular hobby. And I'm pretty sure that was the reason they sent me over there. There were some more linguistic than I, I could speak a little bit of German or French and all that stuff, but I couldn't communicate in Spanish, which was the most important of all the languages, no question about it. If I had known Spanish it would have been ten times easier for me. And, uh, but I did have music and, uh, the kind of music that was bouncy and interesting to them. I learned things from some of the men. Spanish and Hawaiian they seemed to like the best, and all kinds of other things. I always managed to sneak in something patriotic. I'd play a banjo, and I used to play Yankee Doodle Dandy hundreds of times.

DANE: Did they like that?

EVANS: I was trying, I'm very Americanly, they always liked anything with a beat to it.

DANE: Uh-huh. Give me your theory about music. We talked about it on the phone a little bit, in this situation.

EVANS: Well, uh, I knew something about music therapy. I, uh, took some, not courses, but I took, I attended several lectures on, uh, one of them in Bellvue Hospital. And I went with some therapists there one time and to certain people and used certain instruments and played certain things to assist them in their, uh particular need. So I know what that field is. And I, it's more specialized than mine. Mine, I used again, purely for morale. I used to cheer people up. I'm really not a musician. I don't know music at all. I am an entertainer, however, and that's what I was then. And I did a lot of entertaining.

DANE: And you were telling me before that, on Ellis Island, where there were all these nationalities, it was really sort of a universal language for you to use.

EVANS: This is, again, why I believe they sent me over there.

They figured this was the one, one weapon. Now, I can remember on Ellis Island, se,,you got defiance. I would give a talk, I could give a sermon in the church, everybody, you know, they might like or not but they'd say nothing and they'd go home and say very little. But there you'd get a response. If you said something they didn't like they's tell you so right in the middle of your sermon. You'd get, it's a challenge. You had to fight for, uh, your country and your God in a place like that, so it was a constant challenge. So if I had a little bad feeling, one man, I remember, who said he was a lay brother and, uh, in a Mohammadan order. A very fine man. He knew the Bible better than I knew my Bible. He, uh, decided to, he could recite whole passages of it. He was a very well educated man, a fine man. But, uh, we were at odds. But, uh, later on, when I, uh, was in a ward and I was, I got a left-handed guitar so I could teach a left-handed man to play it. He happened to be there at the hearing and, uh, he, uh, and that particular, uh, inroad that I had softened his attitude towards me in general.

DANE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. When you went into the Snake Pit, you had told me this earlier on the phone also, did you bring a guitar with you to that--

EVANS: Definitely. The only way I could get in. I couldn't get in any other way. They wouldn't, I mean, you probably could, but they

wouldn't, you would get thrown out, or else they wouldn't tell you anything. But this was definite the way in. The guitar was the thing.

DANE: So you'd go in--

EVANS: I learned a little Spanish and, you know, Santa Lucia. or something or other, you know, one of the, uh, at that time, one of the well-known. Today, they didn't have Spanish Eyes then, but I could do it now, you know. Whatever was Spanish, or had a Spanish flair to it, sure. And they would play and, uh, they had, they had instruments there. And I'd play along with them. That was it. That's how I'd get in. That's how I got out alive. (They laugh.)

DANE: It was pretty rough.

EVANS: Yeah. It was the safest way. So, uh, they thought I was a great guy and a Good Joe and all that, so, just by virtue of being able to do something like that. So it was, my, my life throughout the whole waterfront was colorful enough. I have to put emphasis on it, more emphasis than I expected to put on it. I was, really got heavily involved in the, in this entertainment field.

DANE: And, did most of the people that were detained there from other countries, somehow I have a sense that there's more than musical and has, you know, songs from their countries and that kind of thing. Did they respond to it immediately, I mean, was it, did you have to coerce them into it? I mean, Americans today don't really have a--

EVANS: I wanted to mention a name. And I'm glad you brought that up, and I hadn't thought about her until now. I want to mention the name of a little old man called Percy Wycoff, W-Y-C-O-F-F. He was a, uh, a man who played piano for the fun of it over in New Jersey. A little short man who had bad eyesight and could only see a little bit out of one eye. And he had a genius of being able to play on the piano almost any old thing anybody wanted to hear. If a man wanted to hear a particular song from his homeland and nobody ever heard it before, if he hummed it a couple of bars, this man could pick it up and make a song out of it. So once in a while I brought Percy Wycoff with me so that a person could hear something from his own country. And this was, I can't say enough for that little man. That was enormously effective. It meant so much to people to hear a song that I had never heard, that he had never heard, but he was able to just drum it out. And I think that little man was, to me, in my memory, as I, I write my memoirs, I have a lot to say about him. I think he did an awful lot of good, that little man. And, I, I got to be very fond of that, that little chap.

DANE: And would they burst into tears, or just--

EVANS: Oh, they would. Yes. They would. There's a great deal of emotion involved. Absolutely. There was a lot of tears shed on Ellis Island, I can guarantee that. Oh, there was. Tears of joy, by the way. I, uh, remember the, one of the last things, before I left the Island we had a, we had a, uh, baseball game between the, uh, detainee, people detained there and the staff. And, uh, I went out, and I played. Fortunately I learned my lesson. This time I refused to be the umpire. If you're the umpire you don't have any friends left. So, uh I played shortstop and I hit at least one single, got one home run. And I don't remember who won the game. I do remember this, That the, uh, oh, I think the staff did win the game. And the people there detained, they took the pitcher up on the shoulders and marched him around the field and sang, and I think that's a very dramatic story that nobody realized happened on Ellis Island.

DANE: I had no idea. How did they know how to play baseball?

EVANS: We taught them that, too. Well, the Japs, Japs had played it all over the world anyway. And, oh, I don't think it was much of a game. It was a fun game. But the whole idea was, uh, it's the same category as the music we did. We tried, we tried to get some universality. You know, we, we used to say on Ellis Island, we used to say, if people would only learn to sing and dance and play sports together we wouldn't have any problems we have today. This is one of the things I've heard said many times.

DANE: Huh.

EVANS: It was one of the slogans of the, of Dr. Abbot, who was the man who was the M.O.C. at that time. The last party I attended at Ellis Island was in his honor. A-B-B-O-T, I don't remember his first name, but I remember that's the party I went to and, uh, the last party I attended there was in his honor.

DANE: The idea about, um, lifting morale and universal language, would you, would they flock to you when they saw you, or would you have to go over to them?

EVANS: They would flock. I would get them every time. Yes. So,

you see, I got a title. I became known as the Musical Chaplain of the New York waterfront. Everybody knew that and, uh, and if someone announced that the Musical Chaplain was arriving I had an audience right away, just like you do with children, you know. If you're going to entertain over here, a clown would come in or somebody who says gives lollipops or do some funny antics, the children would crowd him. I had the same kind of an effect. Yes, they definitely did. Not at first, of course, but, they were a little shy, but when they, when they saw this was neither one thing nor the other, wasn't going to do any harm, no particular good, maybe. (he laughs), but at least it's something that was, uh, neutral and everybody could relate to it, and yes they, I had quite a following if I do say so in that way. But, of course, nowadays it would be different. This was before the days of television and other kinds of entertainment. This was it. I mean, entertainment was a big thing. We did a lot of entertaining on Ellis Island. That was a, that was a very effective program that was had over there on that particular, did a lot of, more good than people realize.

DANE: What else would they be doing all day, the detainee?

EVANS: You, you asked me a question I can't answer. I often wondered. You see, I was there Tuesday and Thursday. I visited people on a one-on-one basis. And, uh, in the afternoon. And Sunday had the service, and the rest of the time I, I wondered, I often wondered. I'd go, you know,

I would go kind of loony if I had to do this. I do, I will say this. Some of the instruments that I had were donated, and we had a closet, at the Seaman's Church Institute, of various instruments, of trumpets and all sorts of things and, uh, I would, if I found a man was interested in a particular instrument, I'd let him take that. And I figured that during the week he'd be playing something, and doing something, I'd give him lessons. I taught by a number system, see. And I, see, I taught, you change a chord according to numbers that I'd call out. And we had a band when I was there at Ellis Island, and near the end of the time there we had a little program. I forgot about that until just now. We put on a little program for the volunteers, which amused the volunteers. It's always the other way around. This time we did one for them. And, uh, we couldn't speak each others' languages, but I had these various string instruments and I had an accordion, a few little, mandolin, a few things, and I tried to teach them. And then I'd call out a number, you know, we'd sing songs everybody would know, like God Bless America, and I'd say one or two or three. The one referred to one finger, the two to two fingers, the three to three fingers, D-7th and so on, and then you had your A-7th, and I didn't use those, I used numbers, how many fingers did you use on the chord, and they changed the various instruments, I kept calling out numbers. And without knowing each others' languages we'd all play the song, just by numbers.

DANE: That's wonderful.

EVANS: Crazy idea, but it worked.

DANE: The sense of accomplishment, too, I mean, of being able to do something.

EVANS: Yeah. It really worked. It's funny. People who had never talked to each other we'd be playing the same song by listening to numbers. (He laughs.)

DANE: So it was a universal language. I mean, it was--

EVANS: Oh, yeah. It was, it was, well, this was, as I said, it was the biggest reason I was sent there and, uh, it called attention to the American Theater Wing and other groups and we had been to get some pretty high class entertainment that came over there.

DANE: Now, tell me. You told me on the phone that, um, Ed Sullivan and his wife did some programs.

EVANS: In my, in my memoirs, I think the story of Ellis Island, to me, is the story of three women. The first one is Alice Palmer, and the second one would Gretchen Green, who

did more work, more good than anybody else I ever knew on Ellis Island. She was there, uh, as a volunteer, she was a very, she was like Mrs. Roosevelt, a very fine woman. She had written a book. She, uh, she was an aide to, uh, to Gore in India, she had been a policewoman in Idaho, she was just a fantastic background and a colorful personality and, uh, she put heavily effort on that. And, uh, the other person that worked with her was Sylvia Sullivan. and, uh, so, uh, we saw a lot of Ed. He came over here lots of times. He came to our parties and various functions and I went to a lot of his parties, I must say. And I entertained at his parties, as well. And, uh, but he said to us, wonderful talent. The only person still living i know of who came to us was Milton Berle. I was there, and introduced the show. Milton Berle was there. And he, Ed sent him, and Jimmy Durante was sent over and I remember it happened that afternoon. I had another call. I had to rush off to a hospital call, so I missed seeing him. But a soon as he came in he took the lady who was cleaning the floor, he made her stand up and slapped her on the back. Funny, when he first came in, funniest thing, you would hear those things about-- Milton Berle was, uh, as far as I know the only one still living who, who was there. But,

uh, I cannot say enough for Ed Sullivan, and I have a whole chapter in my upcoming book just about, what I call the truth about Ed as a person. There's so many things that they say about him, written about him, that I think might not be too accurate, and I try to straighten that out. But his wife Sylvia was a peach. I had pictures of him around here somewhere. I was doing various programs.

DANE: Now, how did it come about that they, oh, time to switch. This is the end of side one, Reverend John Evans, Interview Number 90. It is 11:40.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

DANE: This is the beginning of side two, Reverend John Evans, Interview Number 90. It is 11:45. We were just talking about how it came to be that, um, Sylvia Sullivan and Ed were even involved with Ellis Island. How did they, why were they--

EVANS: Uh, Sylvia Sullivan, you see, the Seaman's Church Institute was a center. Everything happened from there. And

that was a big place. That, we had, uh, fourteen rooms there and, uh, all occupied by men, and we had, uh, as many, between three and six thousand people a day, actually, in and out of that building. They had it busy, because they had a big restaurant. A lot of Wall Street people used the restaurant. And that had lots of programs and things. It was a very busy central place, and I could talk about that all day and all night because it had separate rooms for separate language groups from different countries. It was a, it was a, set up as an international house on a very large scale. And, uh, so everything emanated from there. So one of the people who, uh, happened to be one of the volunteers was Sylvia Sullivan. And, oh, when the Ellis Island thing became, felt there was enough volunteers there, and they wanted some more people interested in giving some morale support, especially amongst some women, and Ellis Island would be the next logical place so she went over there about the same time I did. So I knew Mrs. Sullivan before she got Ellis Island, and I really didn't know Ed until I knew her. I met, worked with her first.

DANE: Uh-huh. And her job over there, did she do music and

entertainment or talking, or--

EVANS: No, she was just a volunteer. You know, I can see her now because, just like any other volunteer in a hospital she'd have the magazines, she pushed the carts around, talked to the patients. She kept a low profile socially. She didn't go out in all glamorous things that he was involved in. And I always admired her for that because, uh, this was the way she wanted to use her life. She didn't want to go to tea parties all the time or entertain celebrities all the time. She wanted to do this. And she put, it was a daily thing. She was thick into it. But she was the chairman of the volunteer association of all the people in the city in similar work. So once a year we had a meeting of the principals involved at the Yacht Club in New York. And Ed presided and the musical chaplain was always invited. And I always sat next to some very unusual interesting people, people you hear about and read about. Um, the last time I was there I sat next to Mrs. Wendell Wilke, for example. And, uh, my mother went one time, one time I took a movie star as my guest. And, uh, of course, after that, everybody wanted to talk to her all the time. She was Debbie Reynolds in "Give The Girl A

Break," it was Helen Wood, it was on Omnibus at that time.

But I played, I played a sample of the Irish harp that I used on Ellis Island and I, right there, at the Yacht Club.

I still have the Irish harp, and I played a sample song on that little Irish harp. Cathy Basie and I sang a little duet, and I have it on tape somewhere. And, uh, oh, on that occasion, and every year he had this year. And that occasion, now when we thought it's time to honor Ed so we, I set up a special program on, um, the Seaman's Institute Auditorium, it's a tremendous auditorium, holds hundreds of people. And, uh, I had the Tiny Fairbank's Show. I was on the Tiny Fairbank's Show. I was on Channel 7, 9, and the W-N-E, W-V-U-E, in Philadelphia as well. I, uh, was on the program by accident. We had, uh, missed subways, and, uh, she brought her two sisters who sang a trio. And, uh, afterwards, uh, one of the volunteers on Staten Island, whose name will come to me in a minute, and she said, "These girls are exceptional and I understand there's an audition being set up at Rockefeller Center." And, uh, so, uh, could I encourage this? I said, "I'll do more than that, I'll take them in there." So I, uh, the girls asked me to go because I played the zither and they had practiced a song on the zither. So I, uh, brought them in for the

audition and, uh, this happened to be the Fred Steel and Tiny Fairbank's Show. And, uh, so afterwards, uh, he came out all smiling, says, "Well, I guess we want you." So I said, "That's very nice." I started to walk out the door.

He says, "Where are you going?" I says, "Well, you got the girls." He says, "What are you talking about? I want all four of you."

DANE: Oh, no!

EVANS: So I found myself on the Tiny Fairbank's Show.

DANE: Oh, great!

EVANS: So the, uh, they gave me a, uh, a, that's how I got to know Jerry Lester, and, uh, Jerry Lester put on a marvelous, best program we've ever had, that Jerry Lester put on.

DANE: Where?

EVANS: We can't, uh, this was on Staten Island. I'll tell you why. Because we practiced on the ferry. We had a show on the ferryboat

and, uh, for the first time in Staten Island history, I'll guarantee it, nobody rushed to the front of the boat to get off the ferry. They were on the back of the boat watching the rehearsal for the show. It was Jerry Lester and a couple of Copacabana girls and Leon Bilasco [PH], and I played the accordion and I signed a lot of autographs. Uh, Kenny, anyway, Kenny somebody who was a famous accordion player. They thought that I, so I signed it anyway. Kenny, I'll think of it in a minute. Isn't that crazy. Anyway, so we got into, into a lot of show people. These show people, very, very busy, and to use that time in this way I thought was really unbelievable that they would be able and, with Ed Sullivan, I have some letters from him here. We had a lot of correspondence just to try and find a date. And usually and alternate date and, but when it came down to honor him we put on big program. I have a picture on the program and a copy of the program that we did at the Seaman's Institute to honor the work that he and his wife had done for, uh, for that. So he was surprised to have something done for him, I think. and that was the first time, he was always known to be very serious, that his wife said he never smiled in public.

DANE: Oh, nice.

EVANS: So anyway, that's how I got involved in that.

DANE: The ferry, talking about going on the Staten Island ferry,

tell me about the place that you, you apartment that looked out--

EVANS: Yes, I had a study, when I first went, uh, the Institute, and all these other things were later. This was the only place I was at was at the Institute itself which was a, which was a piece of the world right there, a very busy place, And I, uh, they put me on the top floor. I remember that very well because I went onto the elevator and a man shook my hand. He said, "My name is Richards." I can't think, David Richards, that's right, David Richards. He says, "I'm a seminarian." He says, "I work the elevator, " he says, "for my extra, you know, help my education." And the reason I mention him is because David Richards now is a bishop in our church, the Bishop of Panama. And he was the man who took me up in the elevator the first time I went in the Institute. And, uh, he took in, up to the thirteenth floor, I think it was thirteen, 1336, I think, was my room number. I have it somewhere. One floor above me, the fourteenth, and a memorial to the Titanic was up there and a radar, sonar school up there. And, uh, on the very top there's a, well, it's, it's, and all sorts of gargoyles up there. I have pictures of all that. But anyway, my room, he said, "I want you to know that you're going to live in a very lonely situation." And I saw, for the next few years what I was going to live with. I was going to live with one very small room, one desk and one chair, one bed and one bureau and that was it. And that's my suitcase, and that's it. It's kind of a dismal way to live, but that was it. But he said,

"You're going to feel better because you're the only person that we got a lady for." I said, "wow." That sounded great to me. So he opened up the curtains and I looked out and for the rest of my ministry, the Statue of Liberty, I looked right at her, every day of my life, eye level. I'm perhaps the only man alive who ever had a regular room looking at the Statue of Liberty.

DANE: Did you get inspiration?

EVANS: Tremendous. Absolutely. There's absolutely no question about it. That thing does something to you when you live with it day and night. I woke up in the morning, I saw it in all kinds of weather. I saw it in fog, that light was constantly there. It influenced my thinking and my preaching and my writing, it does something to you when you, when it's that part of you, it's everything to you. It's the only lady, really, lady friend I ever had I could depend on, she's always there. (He laughs.) And, uh, it's, uh, very romantic to, uh, you know, there's a lot of, for example, I would come back from a funeral, it's not unusual and, uh, I'm the only one there. They'd drag the river and there's a body there and they don't know the man's name. And they, he's just, uh, young, and, uh, there's a scrubwoman and myself and I'd very, very carefully read the whole service like there's a hundred people there. But, you know, it gets to you. When I'd get home and I'd climb the, you know, get up in the elevator and I'd get

to my room and I'd look out the window, see, that lady does something for you. It does, it really does. It's amazing. Now, the top, there's a great big lighted cross you can see from the harbor. So God and country was displayed in my life, absolutely there. And it made an enormous impression on me. Today it does. And without that I, it would have been tough to get through, really, because it was, it was kind of a morose kind of life. If you didn't have a sense of humor or a hobby you couldn't really last too long in there. Six years is about, about it, the most, and I stayed longer than most.

DANE: Uh-huh. And after being on Ellis Island and seeing all these different nationalities and people being detained and maybe being sent away and, um, and you, and then you'd go by her on the ferry, you were really around her all the time.

EVANS: That's it. Because, you see, I commuted, literally commuted, on the Staten Island ferry. So that statue was in sight all the time. And, uh, and believe it or not, people who, oh, they went back and forth every day of their life, to work, you know. They would still notice and talk about that Statue of Liberty. Bedloe's Island was a big island, as little as it is, in that life. It's absolutely a fact. And I can say that. But to me it meant more than that because, uh, to look at the Statue of Liberty from Ellis Island, and the association I had with it is, is another

emotional appeal that someone like my self could only feel, you know. So, that, that Statue, the, they say it means a lot, but when you're actually involved with it the way I was it's a very romantic kind of thing and it's a thrilling thing when you think of it that way. When I give my talks I, I don't use statistics, because everybody else does that. I tell them what the impression was I used to get by that association.

DANE: And what about the weather? You mentioned it just a few minutes ago, the fog. Would you see the sun on it, and the fog and would it change, and--

EVANS: Yes, and I used to hear the, the boats, you know. During the dense fog they would, they would, those foghorns were eerie sounding. The Third Avenue El was, uh, up at that time was very noisy, right by my window, and all those distractions. But still how you get the, at least the impression that the Statue of Liberty was still there. However, the only time I remember I didn't see it was the great fog. I don't think I had that experience. But I happened to be in Staten Island at that time and, uh, I had to crawl across the room, literally. I had to remember where everything was. It was so dense. You couldn't see. My own room, I had to crawl from one place to the other. It was a very eerie feeling. Everything was s o dense you couldn't see, anybody couldn't see anything. And this was the only time, I think, it happened to me, that great fogout, and that's the

only time, I think, that the Statue was obliterated.

DANE: Hmm. And her torch was lit during this time, wasn't it?

EVANS: Yes. All the time. And, uh, I went up, up to where you go up to the arm, but I never did go up the arm. Some people have, I think. That antedates me. But I have been up to where you go to the arm, and so on. But that's, uh, I hadn't been there since, by the way.

DANE: Do you think she knew you?

EVANS: Ha, I, uh, that's another question that nobody's ever asked and I have no way of knowing that. But, uh, I always hoped so. Hoped that she wasn't alone after we were trying to make that liberty message get across the best we can.

DANE: She's a good mistress.

EVANS: Yeah, she was okay, always around. All kinds of moods, but that's a woman, you know. (They laugh.)

DANE: Now, I didn't ask you this specifically, I don't want to run out, I want you to be able to sing, but what kind of instruments would you bring over to Ellis Island?

EVANS: Oh, mostly strings. Yeah, I did have a concertina once, and that's the only instrument I had that anybody else taught me how to play, 'cause I never could play that thing. It's crazy. The chords are all backwards and forwards. I can't figure it out. So I, men used to like to try to do that, 'cause about time they taught me something. They tried, I never could really learn it right, but I know men that did play it and sang. And I did have one and that's about, most of the time it was the strings, yeah.

DANE: Like a, give me examples.

EVANS: Well, the guitars in those days, everybody played and everybody takes different, different methods. That was the most common one. But for my playing, there was no question. The banjo was it. This was the one thing that I found the most popular. But I didn't play the five string, in those days. I played the Dixieland, the four string. I always played patriotic music. I say, uh, You're A grand Old Flag and all, something that's very loud and brassy. But they stirred them somehow. I could play the banjo all day and night, and that's what they liked the best. Although

I was surprised. Once in a great while they'd like to hear the harp, and I did play that on the, I played at the Eisenhower Rally once in Cromwell Center I played the harp. Tremendous audience. And there was a lot of my pals there and they liked it.

DANE: And, the harp, banjo, guitar, concertina, that's kind of a long list.

EVANS: Yeah. About every, but I'd play all the strings.

DANE: You told me also that you yodeled. Did you use to yodel?

EVANS: Oh, yeah. Sure. I used to yodel. My voice get a little low, and how, but I did a lot of yodeling. I used to tape some of my yodeling. I did a lot of cowboy shows.

DANE: Did they like those, the country--

EVANS: Yeah. I entertained at the Rochester Fair. I did a whole hour program up there in New Hampshire. I did a lot of entertaining.

DANE: Uh-huh. Let me see, because I want you to. um, since we

were just talking, this sort of seems like a good time, because this is a better copy. You wrote this. It's called the "Plea Of A Patriot".

EVANS: Yes. I wrote that from the impression I got from the, uh, from my, from people who might think otherwise. People do feel, perhaps for a good reason, that perhaps there's too much immigration and so on. But, uh, romantically speaking, I mean, if you put yourself in someone else's spot and you're a respectable person, you like to know there is a place in the world you're welcome, you know. So that's why I wrote this "Plea Of A Patriot."

DANE: Were you working on Ellis Island the, or was this after that work?

EVANS: This, uh, you mean these thoughts I had?

DANE: Yeah.

EVANS: The thoughts were there, but I think I wrote them down, uh, later in this form, later. Because, uh, when I wrote them down, for some reason or other, Brown University seemed to like it and they accepted a copy in the Harris Collection there, so evidently they claim it's a, it's a,

one of a kind, and it probably is worthy of preservation,
so--

DANE: Did you run into people that thought, "Let's close the doors. What are we bothering with these people. Keep 'em out?"

EVANS: That's why I wrote this. Yes, I did. You're bound to. That's, that's nature, there's nothing wrong with that. In a way they're right. There's some people we don't want over here. There's some people that don't want us over there. That's all right. That's human nature. Not everybody wants everybody everywhere, you know. Of course, the wide open door policy in the beginning made sense, but after, you know, I like everything else, there has to be immigration laws and, uh, what the hell, they're going to solve the Mexican border, nobody knows how they're going to solve that thing, but there has to be some kind of guideline, sure. I realize that. But on the overall, I mean, uh, if you have a balance of thought, you don't want to, you just might leave somebody out. Could be nobody who could become somebody. This is what happened through Ellis Island. People came through, didn't look like anybody, and they became composers and writers and politicians and statesmen and all sorts of remarkable people. Even had mathematicians, and, I guess, and all sorts of, scientists have come that way, so-- So, the risk is worth it. That's why I wrote these verses.

DANE: Okay. Would you read it?

EVANS: Yeah. It's called the "Plea Of A Patriot." "I met a man who stands against the state with vengeful thought, and words of bitter hate. He said the laws were strict and the taxes high while foreign folk came here to multiply. And as he rambled on they came to me the scenes of how our country came to be. The pioneers who braved the great terrain. Courageous men insensible to pain. He had a vision clear, of General George, with frozen, tattered men at Valley Forge. I hear the rations of each rise and fall, and saw the pen at Independence Hall. My mind then wandered to the later years, when Lincoln stood at Gettysburg in tears. Who bore the nation's heart did bloody break, then Bound the wound when freedom was at stake. So while the man raved on about our land, law's complex living and demand, I asked the Lord to pity such as he, and make us thankful in a land that's free."

DANE: Huh. And that says--

EVANS: That says it. And when I give my talks on Ellis Island I usually, I either end with that, or else with the Seaman's Prayer, which I wrote. Either one or the other.

DANE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Looking back over the experience, uh, tell me quickly so we can sing songs. But you said you were there on the last Christmas party.

EVANS: Yes. I have a picture. I'm playing harp at the Christmas party. It's about the only picture I have. Yes, we had a party, this was the staff, and a, and a few other people that were there. And I remember that, as children, just like any other party, except it was small. And, uh, it was intimate and I, we all had the feeling this was the death of an island, and that was what everybody talked about. This is the death of the Island. So we celebrated with two moods. Because we were a very close knit group over there. And we did the usual Christmas party with the a few presents and things, except I felt kind of lonesome, I could get home. But I, you can't go home when you're the chaplain, you've got to stay there, that's the important thing, you know. So it's just, we made it homey, we were all in the same boat. None of us could get home, and we didn't want to detain people. The most important was to think about. And we had there, from the Seaman's Church Institute, uh, they were little, little Christmas boxes. And inside were personal notes and intimate things and things women had made besides other things that we gave to, brought over, nicely wrapped, to everybody, everybody in the place. And, uh, especially those who, you know, who were there, you know, from foreign lands, who couldn't get home. You know, it means, it meant a tremendous lot to them to have it in that

spirit. So we had that gift, kind of gift giving. It's a different kind of gift giving than most.

DANE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Did you know, at that point, that the Island was going to be closed shortly?

EVANS: Oh, yes. Because Gretchen Green, after the Christmas party, Gretchen Green, I could talk about her all day. She was the most remarkable woman I had ever met. And she said to me, "You know," she said, "This is quite an occasion. It looks like we're not going to be together any more this way." She says, "I hope someday there will be a wonderful international museum. Like the Statue of Liberty is out there, there should be an international museum with all the various, best things the country." She said, "I'd like to see a year-round World's Fair." That's what she told me. That was her, because she was the headiest person we had and the most intelligent about the whole Ellis Island situation.

DANE: She was aware of what was going on.

EVANS: She understood the trends, yeah, she, she predicted things that would happen today. She, if you know, she was like Mrs. Roosevelt. She was highly intelligent and very fine. We always approached her with great adoration and, uh, she was not a good looking person, on the homely

side, but she was regal, she was definitely a regal person. And we just, she looked down like a queen. As a matter of fact she, she made a birthday cake for Prince Charles. She wrote me a letter. On the Thames River, she said, "I made a birthday cake for Prince Charles." I have that letter somewhere.

DANE: Was she, did she have a theory about the immigration and who these people were, and what their contributions could be, or--

EVANS: Evidently not. She had a total look at, people were people to her. Like, she, all the time in India, and all the parts of her life. I have a book somewhere. I'll have to, that book is worth looking into. Uh, she was present at the, uh, when the World Year of Prayer (?) began, with the lady who started that idea. And she, uh, she had a world view. Her book is called "The Whole World & Company." "The Whole World & Company." Gretchen Green. And, uh, she had a world view, and I can see why she was friendly with Wendall Wilke because, you see, they felt the same way too. It's, it's wonderful for me, 'cause I was in the world, little big world, all the time. It was very exciting to be brought up that way.

DANE: Uh-huh. You took the last ferry.

EVANS: I don't think so. I think there were other ferrys since. But, I, uh, I took, I was the last chaplain, official chaplain, to take the ferry back. I'm sure of that.

DANE: Do you remember that day?

EVANS: I do remember that day and, uh, very well. And, uh, my thoughts of that day and I, uh, they're complicated with the thoughts of certain individuals that I worked with and I'm going to put all that in writing in the last chapter of a book.

DANE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. When you said goodbye to Ellis Island as a chaplain, as a place that wasn't still going to be open and functioning, what were your thoughts?

EVANS: Well, we. we thought like Gretchen Green did. This was, we'd call this the death of the Island as we knew it. But we had, we had faith that it was, a lot of people thought that it was going to be a jail, it was going to be a hotel or something out there. She just cringed at that idea. She said, "Let's hope that never happens." We talked about that. "Let's hope it will be an international museum, a year-round world's fair."

That's what she kept saying over and over. And she had a lot of influence, powerful influence in, uh, New York. They listened to her. What's happening now, I don't know myself. Uh, it wasn't just her thoughts. That was all our thoughts, really. We agreed with her. We didn't want to see the spirit of the idea go. That's what I mean.

DANE: And that is, can you articulate?

EVANS: Camaraderie. Camaraderie. The spirit of camaraderie.

That was what we liked. It wasn't like having a bunch of exhibits, you go to a place with all exhibits from each country. That's all right, but the fact that, camaraderie. She used to always say, "We don't have to understand people. We're not supposed to understand people." She used to quote from the Bible. The spirit of understanding. That St. Paul said this. It doesn't mean we have to understand. People have to have the spirit of it. It's appreciation. That's what we need. We don't understand everybody. We should appreciate them. That's what she said. She constantly said that. Of course, I remember things like that. Somebody worked longer than I did in the midst of it. Naturally affected my thinking. So the whole thing, you can see how my thinking was affected by the Statue of Liberty, and Gretchen Green and Sylvia Sullivan, and you can see how I get all engrossed in the romance of it.

DANE: Oh, yeah. Oh, and it is. Okay. let's sing, please.

(Break in tape.) Tell me about the song. Why you wrote it.

EVANS: Well, this is a, I'd never been to Hawaii but, uh, but, uh, I took this off a travel folder. But, uh, people tell me that that's the one state of the union that most exemplifies the conglomeration of the races and, uh, people getting along well. So that's why I decided to do the song, to write the song. I used it sometimes when I demonstrate my theory about the American way and be all inclusive. (Plays the guitar and sings to the tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic.) "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the tropic wonderland, the fleet of islands anchored on the Polynesian strand, Hawaiian heaven molded in the way that God had planned, Hawaii, U.S.A. In Hilo of Hawaii fields of orchids are in bloom, above the spacious Parker ranch gigantic mountains loom, at Kona you can see where Captain Cook had met his doom, Hawaii, U.S.A. Fifty stars are on Old Glory, fifty stars are on Old Glory, fifty stars are on Old Glory, Hawaii, U.S.A. A house of sun that Maui is the greatest crater known, from out the flow grew solver swords among the cinder cone. Inio valley rises up, the pinnacle of stone, Hawaii, U.S.A. Molaki's a friendly

island, mountain goat and deer. The cacao palm and taro and pineapple flourish here, the ancient grows and temples lend a sacred atmosphere, Hawaii, U.S.A. Fifty stars are on Old Glory, fifty stars are on Old Glory, fifty stars are on Old Glory, Hawaii, U.S.A. The Garden Isle of Kauai is a paradise on earth. It lured the early Americans that gave Hawaii birth, the golden sand awaits the boat that rides the rolling surf, Hawaii. U.S.A. Oahu boasts the races mingling happily and free, from Honolulu to Romantic Beach in Waikiki, this land of hoola girls and palm is calling from the sea, Hawaii, U.S.A. Fifty stars are on Old Glory, fifty stars are on Old Glory, fifty stars are on Old Glory, United States moves on."

DANE: That's nice. Nice. That's wonderful. And that just shows how different everything is, and it comes together here, is that all the variety.

EVANS: They told me, travelers, and people who live there, I've corresponded, uh, I guess every body has, the people of Hawaii, and they say this is the future America, the future world, in a way. They say there's more of, uh. like I say, they're mingling happily and free, as they, uh, what we're trying to do in the Ellis Island situation. So that's why I say

let's find a place where it's working, and evidently it's working pretty well over there. That's why I was inspired to write this. I had never been there, but I took it off a travel folder. That's the general idea. (He laughs.) For fun, you know.

DANE: That's good. How are we doing on-- Okay. Let's stop then for a second. This is the end of side two, Reverend John Evans, Interview Number 90. It is 12:15.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

DANE: This is the beginning of tape two of Reverend John Evans, Interview Number 90. It's 12:25. We were just talking, you have a book here with some of the songs that you used to sing to people on Ellis Island. What were some of the favorites that you sing and what did they like?

EVANS: Of course, you used to try to, you used to look the situation over and there's no question about it there seemed to be Spaniards coming out of your ears. An awful lot of Spanish peoples, Spanish extraction, there. And so I had to concentrate on some, some of the old things that, uh, Spanish or Italian, something of that nature that would be,

uh, be like a flamingo guitar, something with a little excitement to it. So that's how I got into things like, uh, Santa Lucia and , uh, well, of course, it's before the days of Spanish Eyes, but that's the type of song that they liked. I can't think offhand, but I do have, I did have quite a repertoire of those particular Spanish songs, at one time, and Italian. But, uh, since this was the waterfront there were some old standbys which were of general interest and accepted generally. One of those was a simple song like Red Sails In The Sunset. Everybody seemed to know it, and everybody liked it. And, uh, another one was Con Dios My Darling, and another one was The Isle of Capri.

DANE: Did they know that?

EVANS: Sure. They'd heard it. It was sometimes heard in a different language, but they knew that. And there's no question about the Hawaiian music is the prettiest, the best on the harp. And, uh, so "Tiny Bubbles" was interesting to them and ,uh, and things like that.

DANE: Would they ever, like on the "Isle of Capri" song, would they ever sing with you once they--

EVANS: Oh, yes. They'd pick it up right away, yeah.

DANE: No kidding.

EVANS: Oh, sure. We had, uh, I had a little group there, uh, we had a Big Bob Bear band, a great big fellow who would play harmonica, we had Slim Petty Bone, he played the guitar. He was a typical, uh, hillbilly type, he was perfect for the, for the part. We had, uh, black man who was a great tap dancer. He used to a lot with us. And we had a, one who used to tell funny stories and do little dances, Tommy Shepard. He was the, uh, the, uh (?) Midget, we called him. He was a little man, but he didn't let us call him Midget. He was very small. He had a big hat and smoked a fat cigar. And he was a great entertainer. And he sang along with us. And he and Big Bob Bear together, honest to goodness, it was the craziest looking bunch of people. And we had a great time. And we didn't mind people laughing at us because we had a great time. So that was the kind of folks we were. We were all oddballs, we'd be honest about it. And many times I had to wear crazy outfits. And one time I, I, um, this was, um, this was at, uh Seaman's Institute Program, I came in with a harp and I had a mop on my head imitating Harpo Marx and at the end I had a great big, uh, you know, one of those elastics and I threw, threw it our, and it came with a big bang, you know, and all kinds of crazy things, so, I uh, then I, one time I had to dress up in a tuxedo and I had to take the part of a prince. As a matter of fact, I got into the Actor's Guild eventually. I'm still a life member of the Actor's Guild. They said, this guy ought to be something, so,

uh, so anyway--

DANE: Can you tell me also about--

EVANS: Beautiful Brown Eyes, that's an old song that they liked.

But I think of all the ones that, uh, most significant to me, that I played, I always tried to play it at the end some way or other, it was, Harbor Lights. Harbor Lights is a very old song. Of course, it's a post-war song, but it, it gives the impression of the harbor where we were and the lights coming on and the romance of the whole thing. That particular song I think I played more than about any other in closing the program in that area.

DANE: Did you play it with a harp?

EVANS: Uh, well, yes. I played other instruments, but anything that has a mood to it, anything Hawaiian type, anything that flows, sounds a little better on the harp. All the Irish, well, anything sounds better on the harp. I think Irish and Italian and, uh, the Hawaiian, Irish and Italian are the most suitable to play the harp, I was doing.

DANE: And if you'd sing that for us in a few minutes, I wanted to ask you again, you were saying before we had the tape on about the cowboy songs and you felt like Yankee Doodle was introducing them and they didn't know about Wyoming, will you tell me about--

EVANS: Slim Petty Bone and myself and a few others, uh, we knew the cowboy songs. It's the story of the Old West, it's really folk music, and, uh, the old cowboy songs are very nice and very interesting. Uh, Red River Valley of course and, the most popular one, we did Home On The Range lots of times and, we did Whoopee Tayayo and Streets of Laredo and a few things that most people today still play and sing. But, uh, by doing that we described our country very, very well. We even sang California Here I come. We had a, we didn't have the San Francisco song at that time, at least I didn't have it. But one thing I did sing at Christmas time very many times Santa Claus Is Coming To Town because we felt that that was a message, too, in a way. And, uh, J. Fred Koots who wrote that was a member of our Actor's Guild and played for us every Christmas party, that song. He just passed away a little while ago. And, uh, his song, was used a great many times. I wanted him to go to Ellis

Island. I wrote him a letter and he wrote back with regrets, something, a conflict happened. But I still have the letter, (he laughs), I save everything. Anyway, that particular song, you know, people, it's delicate thing for a chaplain, you get to be a religious person image, but you can't throw religion around because you lose, you lose weight to do that because you're confronted with so many different types and ways of looking at things. So, uh, the spirit of Christmas is, again, the thing that we emphasize, that Santa Claus Is Coming To Town and, you know, it was a simple thing, but it was kind of a religious way to do it, we thought. Plus the carols they all knew anyway but, uh, the guy, our training was to, to go cautiously and to get a worldwide view of what we are doing. And, uh, I was trained by, uh, at the Institute by Reverend Raymond Hall. And he was a, uh, first parachute chaplain in the war, and, uh, he was captured and, uh, did a lot of ministrations for people in concentration camps. Uh, it shortened his life but, uh, he was a great, great man and, uh, and we both had motion pictures done of our lives. He had one done of his life, and I had one done of mine. So we felt, we kind of had fun about that. But his, uh, his life was, uh, really fantastic and, uh, the thing we were

thrilled about was that till the end of his time there he was given an honorary doctorate from Brown University, his same alma mata as mine. And the reason, that's for heroism. Not because he gave a lot of money or because he'd written a lot of books, because of heroism. And I thought that was a great thing for Brown University to do and it raised the moral and spirits of everybody on our staff.

DANE: See that's the thing with recognition.

EVANS: We had a wonderful, uh, he was very modest about that, but we refused that modesty and we made quite a bit of it at the Institute, at the, we went to the dining room down there, we had whale steak, that was the menu at that time, and we had quite a ceremony. I went on about that.

DANE: Okay. (Break in tape.)

EVANS: (He plays the harp.) Are you ready? Let me know. (He sings the song Harbor Lights.) Red Sails In The Sunset was, uh, always a popular one because so many, most all people had been to sea and been to the parts of the world where the sailboat was predominant and where the harbors

were full of them and there was a lot of romance about it. And everybody seemed to know it, so-- (Sings the song Red Sails In The Sunset and an Irish song, plays Silent Night on the harp and banjo songs and guitar Streets of Laredo.)

DANE: This is the end of side one, tape two, Reverend John Evans, Interview Number 90. It's 1:10.