

NPS-155
ELEANOR IRWIN PARK
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HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Park worked as a Hospital Dietician at Ellis Island from 1939-1950. 'Ned' is also present.

PHILLIPS: Tell me your name, and what you actually did on Ellis Island.

PARK: You mean my married name?

PHILLIPS: No, give us your name when you--

PARK: Maiden name?

PHILLIPS: -- when you were working at Ellis Island. Maiden name, yes.

PARK: My maiden name was Eleanor Irwin. You want me to go on, say what--

PHILLIPS: Yeah, what did you do on Ellis Island? Mrs. Irwin-- or Mrs. Park - Eleanor Park,

PARK: I was a hospital dietician, along with four other dieticians. We were responsible for the entire food service, feeding all the patients, the staff, anyone that was entitled to meals.

PHILLIPS: Can you remember what particular meals that you cooked? What was the diet? What was the kind of food that the people got? There were so many different nationalities from all around the world; it must have been difficult to-

PARK: No, it really wasn't. Most of them were -- took the regular diet, except those who were on special diets for -- diabetes, or some particular disease.

PHILLIPS: Can you remember what they ate? What a menu might be, an average kind of menu?

PARK: Average menu? Oh, it'd always have, for instance for lunch, a main - sou-- usually soup, and a main meat, such as chicken or ham, couple of vegetables, salad and dessert.

PHILLIPS: That sounds pretty good.

PARK: Yes, they had - they had good meals, they really did. Many of the patients, uh, went to--we had two cafeterias--

PHILLIPS: When you say "patients," you were working in a hospital.

PARK: That's all hospital. Tubercular, Psychiatric, General. We had no medic--or surgical patients at all. They were all sent to the hospital in Staten Island.

PHILLIPS: So in fact, you didn't work or prepare food for the general population; you were specialized.

PARK: For anyone that ate a meal on the Island, we fed them.

PHILLIPS: Oh I see, for everybody.

PARK: For everybody. Not immigration. We fed everybody in -

PHILLIPS: Public health.

PARK: in the hospital.

PHILLIPS: In the hospital. How many people would that be at one sitting?

PARK: Well, at times our bed capacity was 400.

PHILLIPS: And there were that many people there? Four hundred people?

PARK: Most of the time.

PHILLIPS: How many years were you working there?

PARK: Eleven.

PHILLIPS: Eleven years.

PARK: Eleven years, that's right.

PHILLIPS: And how long did the people usually stay in the hospital?

PARK: Well, immigration patients -- it varied. Sometimes they'd be there for several weeks, depending on what the trouble was. We had a TB patient from -- I forget which country it was, but anyway, they didn't know she had TB when she came to this country and soon she was hospitalized. And was hospitalized for several - several months.

PHILLIPS: Okay, let's just continue here. I should point out that the date today is the 17th of November, 1987. All right, back to talking about--I'm particularly interested, I think people would be particularly interested to hear about the dietary problems that perhaps some of the immigrants had. These were people who in many instances probably hadn't even seen the kinds of food you were serving up. These were people who

were in many instances very poor, who had come from very deprived backgrounds, weren't they?

PARK: Well, some were, yes. But they all soon learned to eat the food and enjoy it. (laughs) There were some of course, that wouldn't eat pork. And -- but we made allowances for that.

PHILLIPS: How did you make allowances for it?

PARK: Made a substitution, some other kind of a food which they would take.

PHILLIPS: Like what?

PARK: Eggs, cheese, cottage cheese, something like that.

PHILLIPS: Can you remember or recall the response of the immigrants to the diet? To the food that they were served?

PARK: As a whole, they were very receptive. I'll never forget one night, about three o'clock (maybe you don't want this here) about three o'clock in the morning, my telephone rang, and it was the officer of the day, saying that the Coast Guard - or a ship had been hit out at sea and they were bringing in these patients, and they hadn't had a thing to eat for three days. So the officer of the day wanted to know if I'd help him get them something to eat. So he and I fixed a meal for them and we had soup and canned peaches and bread. We didn't want it too heavy, because they hadn't had any food. And -- there wasn't one patient that left that line in the cafeteria that didn't say thank you. They were very receptive, and appreciative. And that happened every once in a while, especially during the war.

PHILLIPS: Can you recall perhaps a little bit of those wartime experiences on Ellis Island?

PARK: Well, we had many, many patients brought in. We were busy; we were very busy. And we had the Coast Guard there too. They had a train' station there and they patrolled the sea wall.

PHILLIPS: The training station--

PARK: For Coast Guard. They patrolled the sea wall, 24 hours a day.

PHILLIPS: What was the sea wall?

PARK: The sea wall was the wall all around the Island. Yeah.

PHILLIPS: And so you were feeding them as well.

PARK: If they were on duty, yes. If not, they were fed in their base.

PHILLIPS: Tell us a little bit about the kitchen. How many kitchen workers were there?

PARK: Oh dear, exactly -- we had two kitchens; a crew of people covering one kitchen, and a crew covering the other. There were usually up to 20, by the time the cafeterias were covered, too.

PHILLIPS: Were the two kitchens working at the same time?

PARK: Yes.

PHILLIPS: Which kitchen served which group?

PARK: The kitchen on Second Island served the cafeteria.

PHILLIPS: I'm sorry; the what?

PARK: What they called "Second Island." You know, Ellis Island's three - three islands.

PHILLIPS: All right.

PARK: Immigration's first. Second Island is the - really, the medical part of the hospital. And Psychiatric and Tubercular are Third Island. And we had cafeterias in both Second and Third Island. And if a patient was able to go to the cafeteria, he went to the cafeteria to eat. If not, he was served a tray.

PHILLIPS: Served by orderlies, or nurses?

PARK: Usually orderlies. Although many times the nurses actually served the tray.

PHILLIPS: So there were two kitchens, and there was a total of twenty people working in those two kitchens?

PARK: In those two kitchens, right.

PHILLIPS: And were these people, were these trained chefs, were they trained or--

PARK: Oh, the chefs were all trained. And the others were trained. If they were hired and had no background, they were trained.

PHILLIPS: And were they considered to be good chefs, proud of their--

PARK: Yes they were; they were very good. Many of them were there for a long time. In fact, most of them retired when they closed Ellis Island. They had been there long enough to take retirement.

PHILLIPS: I see. So you had to take the ferry out to Ellis Island every morning.

PARK: No. If you were a single person you were required to live on the Island. All employees, even the doctors. If they weren't married, they had to live on the Island. So, we took the ferry out if we had a day

off. But not just--you just couldn't go out anytime you wanted to, if you were on duty.

PHILLIPS: Do you remember how many people were living on the Island when you were living on it? Can you tell me?

PARK: It's hard to say. With all the nurses, all the dieticians, several doctors, and all the employees that weren't married. Oh, fifty, maybe -- more than that.

PHILLIPS: So you must have had a social life out there.

PARK: We did. Did you ever, we had

PHILLIPS: What did you do for entertainment, during the week or weekends?

PARK: We had parties of different kinds. We had dances, we had movies. Ed Sullivan -- his wife was the head of the 'Gray Ladies.'

PHILLIPS: Ed Sullivan? His wife?

PARK: His wife was head of the 'Gray Ladies'.

PHILLIPS: The 'Gray Ladies'? What were they?

PARK: They were volunteer workers, help patients.

PHILLIPS: And they would come out on the public boat to--

PARK: They'd come out on the boat in the morning; usually go home -- five o'clock at night.

PHILLIPS: And what would the 'gray' workers do?

PARK: They helped patients from -- with social problems, and let's see--

PHILLIPS: What kinds of problems?

PARK: Well maybe, ca-- contacting parents, or family, or foreign people.

PHILLIPS: People who might have arrived and were looking for their family and that kind of thing.

PARK: Right. They had church services twice a day on Sunday. One in the morning, one in the evening. They had many entertainers came over; various programs.

PHILLIPS: Can you think of any particularly memorable occasions when that happened?

PARK: When they closed the hospital. Ed Sullivan came over; brought a group of entertainers along. Brought all the refreshments. Entertained all the staff of the hospital. It was a lovely affair.

PHILLIPS: Do you remember what date that was?

PARK: Well, it was a Friday night. I know I was late getting there because I was going to Columbia. And when I got there, it was about over with. It was probably the last Friday in May of that year.

PHILLIPS: 1950.

PARK: In the year the place closed.

PHILLIPS: And perhaps, what other kinds of social events happened out there? Can you tell us a little about that? Dances, for instance. Did you have your own orchestra, or your own band? Or did they--

PARK: Oh no, they imported a band.

PHILLIPS: They imported a band.

PARK: In fact, he was related to one of the male nurses. He had a very fine band. They really had lovely, lovely parties. We had tennis courts. There was usually something going on, if you wanted to be entertained.

PHILLIPS: Did you ever get bored? Out on the Island?

PARK: No, I don't think so. Because we -- everybody went to town - lot to movies and so forth.

PHILLIPS: So you really--I mean, here you were, living close to this enormous metropolis, this extraordinary city, New York City particularly at this time, during the '50s, up - '30s, '40s, '50s, that time when New York was probably seen to be in some ways more robust than it is now in the 1980s, a different kind of city.

PARK: Right.

PHILLIPS: Did you feel somehow left out of it, because you could literally see it from--you could almost see the light s of Broadway from where you were--

PARK: That's right. South Ferry. Yeah, you really could. And of course, for a nickel, you could go to Columbia, you could go uptown, you could go any place you wanted to. Look what it costs today! (laughs)

PHILLIPS: So you didn't really feel out of it, or did you feel sometimes?

PARK: No, I don't think so. If I used to go to different meetings, professional meetings.

PHILLIPS: On the mainland.

PARK: On the main-- Oh yes, they'd --

PHILLIPS: Did you call it the mainland, or?

PARK: Mainland? Yeah.

PHILLIPS: Did you feel like an island person, living on Ellis Island? They say that people who live on islands get an island mentality. Did you ever feel that you were a little bit different from the mainlanders?

PARK: No, I don't think so. I don't think so. No. The only time we were a little dubious was when we had a terrible -- the water came over the sea wall. Nobody could get in; the boat couldn't get in. People that were on the Island produced the meals and fed the people. No. That was really pretty, pretty serious. That was really bad.

PHILLIPS: Bad storm.

PARK: Very bad storm.

PHILLIPS: Did you get many bad storms?

PARK: Well, not -- not too many. But enough. One of the worst was the day I arrived on Ellis Island.

PHILLIPS: Tell me what date that was.

PARK: I think it was the 31st of January.

PHILLIPS: Which year?

PARK: 1939. Anyway, the regular Ellis Island ferry was in dry dock for repairs. And so we got down -- in fact, my brother went with me. He didn't want me traveling in New York all alone. Because I'd never been to New York. So he went with me. We got down -- the Immigration Officer said, "Now don't worry about getting on that boat." The ice had broken, so these huge cakes of ice were coming down the river. It was frightening. And one night, I'd been to church, in New York. And one of the nurses was sitting downstairs on the--this was another relief boat. She was sitting downstairs and she says, "Eleanor, come on. Let's go upstairs." She says, "It's so beautiful out."

So we went upstairs, and we weren't up there but a few minutes, and our boat started to go and it hit a-- another boat, and the Coast Guards came running up with life preservers. We were frightened. But, they finally came back and said that it hit above the water line, so we were safe. So they let the boat go to Ellis Island. And then it went back to dry dock too. But it was frightening.

PHILLIPS: Perhaps we could get back to the specific tasks that you had there as a dietician. Can you tell me what specifically you were supposed to be doing; what was your work? What did a dietician do in 1939, when you first went out there? What kind of responsibilities did you have?

PARK: Well, you were -- responsible for the complete food service. Ordering all the food. Planning the menus. Seeing that they were properly served. Living within the budget. And the budget those days was a lot less than it is today. (laughs)

PHILLIPS: Let's perhaps go through three of those things: ordering the food, planning the menu, and the budget. Tell me about ordering the food. Where did you order the food from?

PARK: From New York, wholesalers. We had contracts. We had contracts for everything. And we were responsible for letting those contracts.

PHILLIPS: And so the dietician--would you recommend that to some administrative person that you would go to this particular company or that company to buy the lamb chops and that company to buy the lettuce and tomatoes?

PARK: Well, they were - they were all monthly contracts, except what? I think, milk. Milk and ice cream weren't - they were three months. So at the beginning, before the month would be coming up, you'd send out these bids and they'd make the bids and we'd meet at a certain time and they'd be opened. And sometimes the men from the companies would come over to see that they were given a fair chance.

PHILLIPS: Salesmen would come over, wouldn't they? It must have been a pretty nice contract to get.

PARK: Some of them were. Certainly were. They were - they were glad to get 'em.

PHILLIPS: Because this was right during the depression, wasn't it. Or soon after the depression. So you would contact those companies. I suppose when you say the contracts were let monthly, generally the same company would get the contract, I would imagine.

PARK: As a rule. They did.

PHILLIPS: There was a government regulation that said that each month; they had to be re-letting of the contract.

PARK: Right. .

PHILLIPS: What about planning the menus? Tell us how you went about doing that?

PARK: Well. We just sat down and planned them. (laughs)

PHILLIPS: Did you plan them as a group, or separately?

PARK: We varied; we varied it. I was the Assistant Chief Dietician then.

PHILLIPS: Who was the Chief?

PARK: The Chief was a person that'd been in the Service quite a lot longer than I had.

PHILLIPS: Who was that?

PARK: Louise Smith. She was from Iowa.

PHILLIPS: They were all women, the dieticians?

PARK: Yes. Not today. But in those days, they were. We didn't have any male dieticians at all. Male nurses, but no dieticians.

PHILLIPS: So you would sit down with Louise Smith and plan or sometimes you would plan as the Assistant, or--

PARK: And then she'd review.

PHILLIPS: She always reviewed.

PARK: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: And how about variety? How did you design variety into the--

PARK: Well, later on, not when I got there, but later on, we had a selective menu. And the patients all underlined their menus of what they wanted, which made them all happy.

PHILLIPS: How about languages? Were they printed all in English, or--

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PARK: They were all English. But we always had -- of course; the language difficulty was usually with immigration patients. And there's always an immigration person around that could speak the language -- the language.

PHILLIPS: Many different languages.

PARK: Many. That's right. And, of course, those in the cafeteria, they wouldn't make out a menu, because they could see the food and know what they wanted.

PHILLIPS: They could just point.

PARK: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: And that was in the cafeteria. But you were -- you were also responsible for that, weren't you?

PARK: Oh yes. For two cafeterias. And the doctors' dining room, and a staff dining room -- nurses.

PHILLIPS: So you were responsible for two cafeterias. the doctors' dining room--

PARK: And the nurses'.

PHILLIPS: And the nurses'.

PARK: And employees.

PHILLIPS: And the employees.

PARK: Of course, you know, the nurses are considered a little higher echelon. (laughs)

PHILLIPS: The nurses were considered higher echelon. And all of those twenty cooks, or twenty, obviously not cooks, but twenty kitchen workers were responsible for all of those--

PARK: All those meals.

PHILLIPS: And what about these higher echelons. Did the doctors get one kind of food and the nurses another kind of food, was there a little bit of distinction?

PARK: No, no. No, they were very sim-- practically the same thing.

PHILLIPS: So, it was very much egalitarian; sort of equality thing.

PARK: Right, right.

PHILLIPS: Everyone got the same kind of food. From the immigrants up?

PARK: From the immigrants down. Right.

PHILLIPS: What about the budget? Can you remember perhaps--well, how did you decide on a budget, and can you give us some comparison, for instance, how much would it cost you to have fed one person in those days.

PARK: I -I may not be thinking right, but it seemed to me that our allotment per patient was 49 cents.

PHILLIPS: 49 cents per patient?

PARK: Per patient.

PHILLIPS: Or per meal?

PARK: Per meal. per three meals.

PHILLIPS: For one day?

PARK: Yeah, for one day.

PHILLIPS: 49 cents a day.

PARK: But when we left Manhattan Beach, our - our ration allotment was a dollar--of course, they were all TB patients; that makes a difference; they get more. Was \$1.15, as I recall.

PHILLIPS: When you left in 1950, it was \$1.15 a day.

PARK: Nineteen si--sixty. Sixty.

PHILLIPS: Oh, but that was after--I see. That was after Ellis Island closed in 1950. But when you--

PARK: When they closed Manhattan Beach.

PHILLIPS: Oh, I see. When they closed Manhattan Beach.

PARK: And we were to live within that allotment.

PHILLIPS: Was it difficult to feed the people for the amount of money that you were allotted?

PARK: No, we d-- did the job. We kept a running food cost, so we knew where we were all the time. All your expenses, you could keep track of it.

PHILLIPS: What was the morale like amongst the workers out there, was it good?

PARK: It was very good. Many of the people, many of our waitresses had never set foot on United States soil. They wanted a job when they got to Ellis Island; the hospital had some openings, and they got them.

PHILLIPS: Right there and then.

PARK: Right there and then. We had one girl, Mary Daley, that came to this country in 1918. And when it came time to close the hospital in 19 - what was it? --50. Mary - Mary said, "I've never slept anywhere but on Ellis Island and I don't intend to ever sleep anywhere but on Ellis Island." Well, the Coast Guard was taking over, so the Coast Guard were going through the hospital saying they'd like certain pieces of equipment, and so forth and so on. So when they came to her sewing machine, she was in the linen room, the Coast Guard officer said, "Oh, we could use that. We need somebody." And our man, Maintenance - well, he was in charge of supplies and all, he says, "Only on one condition, can you have that sewing machine." And they said, "Well, what is it?" And they said that she di-- he said, "You'll have to take the girl that goes with it." And then she was in her late eighties, I think.

So she stayed on and she stayed in rooms in the hospital. And one night, the - the same man was in charge of equipment had stayed on to help finish up everything, and Mary wasn't out getting breakfast, so he knocked on her door. She was unconscious, and lived until--I think it was November - November, December, I forget which. But she never slept anywhere as far as she was concerned, but on Ellis Island. She'd go to her sister, she wouldn't stay overnight.

PHILLIPS: So there was a real affection from this obviously--in her, for Ellis Island, but generally, there was this sense of a real special place?

PARK: That's right. And there were several others, a number of others had the same feeling.

PHILLIPS: Did you have that?

PARK: I enjoyed it.

PHILLIPS: I mean, did you feel that perhaps also, that this was a special kind of work, that the people that were coming in--I mean, were you inspired by them, or were you depressed by them, or was it different? What sort of feelings did you feel with all these--this was the spirit of America, the land of the free, the home of the brave, the Statue of Liberty; here they were arriving from Europe. This was the dream coming true; was there a sense of that?

PARK: Yes, I think there was.

PHILLIPS: Or am I being too romantic?

PARK: No, I don't think so. Because there were a lot of people that were quite upset when they closed that hospital. Many people were. Because I was going to Columbia at the time, working on a Masters, so I didn't-- when you're going to school, you don't have much time to think too much of other things. But --

PHILLIPS: Do you remember perhaps any particular stories about people not enjoying the food, being angry and complaining. Was there much of that that went on at all?

PARK: No, there really wasn't too much. You'll always have a certain amount. But as a whole, they were pretty well satisfied. TB patients are there for a long - were there for a long period of time. And I think it was harder on them. For instance, one TB patient was there when I arrived there, and I was transferred to Manhattan Beach, and he was transferred to Manhattan Beach. Then, when I resigned to go- to be married, when they were closing the hospital, the last thing, I was making my rounds one day, and this patient said to me, "Miss Irwin, I want to speak to you." And I said, "Yes?" And he said, "They're sending me to Florida. You've been the one of the dieticians in these two hospitals I've been in, and I want you to go to Florida." So I told him that I'd made other plans. I doubt if he's still alive.

PHILLIPS: Perhaps you could tell us why you originally wanted to go to Ellis Island. I'm assuming that you worked elsewhere before that, but how did you come to be at Ellis Island?

PARK: Well, when I was a student intern, at Indiana University Medical Center--

PHILLIPS: Where?

PARK: Indiana University Medical Center; that's where we -- I did my year's internship.

PHILLIPS: Indiana

PARK: Indiana. In Indianapolis. Jobs were very hard to get.

PHILLIPS: What year was this?

PARK: This was '35. So I had a letter from my father one day, and he saw an ad on the bulletin board in the post office, "Dietician needed on Ellis Island." So he took a copy of it and he sent it to me and I applied. And I didn't hear anything from them for--I forget how many years it was. And I had a job; I had a job at the University, and I also had a job at the Methodist Hospital. So when it finally came through, their salaries were so much better, I decided I better take it.

PHILLIPS: Finally. How long was finally?

PARK: It was nearly five years.

PHILLIPS: It took a long time for them to respond. You must have forgotten about it.

PARK: Well, I pro-- I think I had. But when it came through, I thought, "Well, I might as well take it."

PHILLIPS: So you left Indiana?

PARK: I left Indiana.

PHILLIPS: Became an immigrant of sorts yourself.

PARK: Yeah, right. That's right.

PHILLIPS: How did it feel, crossing the country on your way to New York?

PARK: Well, I had a brother and a sister both here, so I think that was the real decision. That made me make that decision.

PHILLIPS: Did you get a surprise when you saw Ellis Island? What did you feel when you took the first boat ride out there?

PARK: Well, the first boat ride's when we had all the ice bouncing around, and we felt for sure we were going to be--have one of those huge cakes of ice go in the side of the boat.

PHILLIPS: Must have been a pretty cold winter that year.

PARK: It was a terrible winter. Terrible! But, we made it. And then, on top of that, I was there about a month, and the Commanding Officer called me in one day.

PHILLIPS: Do you remember his name?

PARK: Dr. Sweeney. He said, "Miss Irwin, did you know you're a typhoid carrier?" And I said, "What?" And he said, "Yes, you're a typhoid carrier," and I said, "Dr. Sweeney, I don't believe it." I said, "I've been working in these two huge hospitals in Indianapolis, and they're very fussy about making routine physicals and tests and all that." So he said, "Well, I'm going to have you work just in the office and not be around food, till we get final results from Washington." They had to send specimens to Washington. So, this went on for weeks, and a letter came back from Washington, telling them they'd better get on the ball; they didn't know what they were talking about. They were entirely wrong. And the funny thing is, that one of the fellows there that had done the test, he wanted to see me. He was in the hospital dying of cancer. And he apologized; he says he doesn't know how it ever happened.--But he apologized to me for--

PHILLIPS: That would have been pretty serious, for a dietician to have--
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PARK: Be terrible! You wouldn't be able to work anywhere. And I knew it couldn't be right. So.

PHILLIPS: What about your quarters when you first arrived? What were your quarters like?

PARK: When I first arrived, we just had one room. They were - they were nice.

PHILLIPS: Describe the room for us.

PARK: Well, and the bathroom was across the hall from my room, and then a nurse was in this little room here.

PHILLIPS: You shared the bathroom.

PARK: Yes.

PHILLIPS: With how many people?

PARK: I think there were four of us. About four. And my room was almost as large as this room.

PHILLIPS: Big as an average living room.

PARK: What? Oh, he's got a picture of it in there.

PHILLIPS: Yes, she just showed me a picture of her venue.

PARK: It's a --. But, I - then-- before long I had--

PHILLIPS: This is tape number two with Mrs. Eleanor Parks/Miss Eleanor Irwin, recorded on the 17th of November, 1987, continuing talking about Ellis Island. And we're going to go through some photographs now, which you have in from of you. We were just talking about your room; perhaps you can start by that. You have a small photograph of your room, and maybe I can just describe some of it and then you can also. I see that it's about the size of a fairly small living room. I think.

PARK: Yes.

PHILLIPS: And it has, I can see heating pipes, one window with curtains and it looks very comfortable. You've obviously done it up yourself. It looks like any apartment anywhere, you would say I suppose, of that period.

PARK: A sun porch on the outside.

PHILLIPS: There was a --

PARK: The full length. Yeah.

PHILLIPS: Did everyone have a sun porch?

PARK: That side of the building, yes.

PHILLIPS: Very comfortable room. And you standing outside the hospital with your nurse's cape. Tell us about what you wore.

PARK: Cape. Well, we wore regulation nurses' white uniforms. White caps with dieticians was specified with a blue band on it. And our capes were navy blue lined with light blue.

PHILLIPS: Smart.

PARK: Smart, yes.

PHILLIPS: Different from the other nurses?

PARK: The nurses had r-- red bands. They were wi-- wine colored band on their hats.

PHILLIPS: And different colored capes were--

PARK: And -and their capes were, yes.

PHILLIPS: Beside --

PARK: Right, right. This was the Seamens' Church Institute dinner at Ellis Island Alumni Fellowship Reunion, April 17, 1958.

PHILLIPS: This is a memento from that dinner--

PARK: From that dinner, that's right.

PHILLIPS: A fold-out kind of, like a menu card, but it's not in fact a menu, is it? Looks like a menu anyway.

PARK: I forgot who took the picture, but I think the Coast Guard did.

PHILLIPS: That's a picture of Ellis Island in 1939. They handed this out to everybody.

PARK: Everybody got one of these.

PHILLIPS: At the reunion, which was what date?

PARK: April 17, 1958. We had 175 people return for it.

PHILLIPS: I bet there was a lot of stories went around the room that night.

PARK: Oh yes, yes. Of course, this is all immigration. This is hospital, and this is hospital. The speaker of the evening was Commissioner of Immigration. What's his name? Yeah, former Commissioner of Immigration. Honorable Edward Cors-- Corsi. That's right.

PHILLIPS: How do you spell that?

PARK: C-O-R-S-I.

PHILLIPS: How were you treated out there? You were treated well by the staff and by the immigration authorities?

PARK: Oh yes, yes. They were very good. This is another dietician from the south. See what the snow was.

PHILLIPS: Deep snow.

PARK: Deep snow. And here are the five of us. On the steps of the hospital

PHILLIPS: Maybe you could tell me who those five people are, what their names are.

PARK: That is myself, in front.

PHILLIPS: That is Eleanor Irwin.

PARK: Yes, that's right. This girl is--

PHILLIPS: And you were then the assistant?

PARK: Yes. And this was the chief.

PHILLIPS: What was her name?

PARK: Louise Smith. She's retired and lives out in Sun City or someplace. Arizona. This girl is Ruth Turnbull. She lives in Texas. This girl is Katherine McGrath. She was a polio victim. And I don't know whether she's still alive or not; she was in New York. And this Julie Richards. She lives down in--where's it your cousin lives?

NED: Hilton Head.

PARK: Hilton Head.

PHILLIPS: So you said there were five people there, right?

PARK: Right.

PHILLIPS: So in fact there were five dieticians, not four.

PARK: Five, right.

PHILLIPS: There were five dieticians.

PARK: That's right.

VOICE: I think there were four earlier than -

PARK: Well, this is me. This is nutrition week, while you're trying to educate all the public.

PHILLIPS: Nutrition week?

PARK: In March. Every March.

PHILLIPS: That was carried out every March and that was of course, carried out on to the Island. But there, the people didn't have to worry about nutrition because you were feeding them.

PARK: Right. Right.

PHILLIPS: People didn't cook their own meals, they were prepared for them.

PARK: These are those two same dieticians. This is the cripple. And this is the Texas girl. This was the Assistant Chief Nurse, in uniform. You see, the Public Health Service had a Commission Corps. You could be commissioned or you could be regular civil service.

PHILLIPS: And you were?

PARK: Regular.

PHILLIPS: Regular.

PARK: In fact, all ours were, I think. And this is another dietician. Claudia. [papers rustling] There's two more dieticians; this one is from Staten Island.

PHILLIPS: I see.

PARK: That's one of our chefs.

PHILLIPS: Tell us about the chefs. Did they--were they all--did you pick up any French chefs coming through immigration that stayed?

PARK: No, no. I don't know of any. This was an excellent baker. He, when they closed the hospitals, was transferred to San Francisco. I've heard that he passed away.

PHILLIPS: Have you got any particular remembrances of any special meals that were specialties at Ellis Island?

PARK: Oh, of course, holiday meals were always made special.

PHILLIPS: Thanksgiving must have been quite a--

PARK: Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years; they were all - all special. There's two more. That's our butcher. One on the right.

PHILLIPS: So the food was delivered out there-- perhaps we could talk a little bit about that. How was the food delivered? Obviously, by boat.

PARK: It wasn't de--it wasn't delivered by truck. Because no trucks were allowed on the boat. There was one car, a VW, that was on Ellis Island. A doctor was transferred, and he got permission to take the gasoline out of his car, take the car over and unload it, and take it back. Other than that--

PHILLIPS: So everything was carried by hand or on--

PARK: They had special - well, it's a special truck, small ones. They'd bring the food over on the; they'd deliver it, really, on the S-- South Ferry side, piled on these trucks, and take it over and deliver it to our people. We had a helicopter, I think once in all the time I was there. A helicopter brought in a patient. So you see we had -- we didn't have any cars, anything.

PHILLIPS: Were there special requirements for some of the sick patients? I suppose there must have been. The TB patients, for instance -- were they given special meals?

PARK: Oh, yes, yes they were. And some of them were very sick for a long period of time.

PHILLIPS: Do you remember how many sick people; how many--you had to service regularly; I think--

PARK: Well, we -- we ran up to 400 patients.

PHILLIPS: Four hundred patients, you could say that -

PHILLIPS: But not all the time. But we do the - we did run 400. Now Manhattan Beach, their capacity was 350. So that's all they ever ran.

PHILLIPS: With the large numbers and changing numbers of people coming through Ellis Island, how did you manage to cater adequately? I mean, you wouldn't know month to month, would you, of how many people were going to be coming through? Or were--

PARK: It stayed pretty constant.

PHILLIPS: It stayed pretty constant.

Park: Pretty, pretty constant.

PHILLIPS: What about perhaps, is there any specific--anything you can tell us--any specific stories that you can--

PARK: Ellis Island? Of course, you've all heard of the Black Tom explosion.

PHILLIPS: Why don't you tell us about your experience.

PARK: I didn't-- I wasn't there. But that's one story you always heard when you landed on Ellis Island,

PHILLIPS: How did they tell it to you?

PARK: They--well it was just in back of us really. It could have been-- it did a certain amount of damage to the hospital buildings, as I recall. But it could have been much worse. I think that was during the First World War. I'm sure it was.

PHILLIPS: What did they tell you about when you arrived -- in terms of that story?

PARK: Oh, they just wanted to be sure that you heard about it. Was the main thing.

PHILLIPS: Tell us the story.

PARK: Well, it was this--Ned, do you know there? There was this terrific explosion over in New Jersey. Practically blew up the whole section of New Jersey. And there were marks on our buildings which were caused by the Black Tom.

PHILLIPS: On Ellis Island.

PARK: Yup. We had a fire one night; one of our kitchens caught fire. That wasn't too m-- too much fun. It was pretty serious, too.

PHILLIPS: What happened? Do you remember what year that was?

PARK: I think it was around, '50 - let's see --about five years before we moved.

PHILLIPS: Tell us what happened.

NED: [not understood] fire

PARK: Oh, we had a lot of damage, a lot of damage. So we had to consolidate both kitchens, in order to keep functioning. I forgot now what the cause of the fire was, but it was - it was the kitchen on Third Island. And, well we had different things that be exciting -- patients escaping. Patients trying to swim the river in back of the hospital.

PHILLIPS: Can you remember any specific instances of that occurring?

PARK: Oh yes.

PHILLIPS: Tell us a little bit about them.

PARK: Well, nobody knew how this patient ever got out of the hospital but he did and he went out, and he just jumped over the sea wall. And there's a terrific undertow there, so it wasn't long-- he was gone.

PHILLIPS: Did that happen often? Once a year, would a patient try to escape?

PARK: It didn't happen too often -- too often.

PHILLIPS: How often? On average?

PARK: Well, maybe I shouldn't say twice a month, but I'd say nearly once a month.

PHILLIPS: Why were they trying to escape? They just didn't like--

PARK: They wanted to get back to their own countries.

PHILLIPS: They thought they'd made a mistake in immigrating and here they were--with tuberculosis. Were these mainly TB patients or what kind of patients?

PARK: No, those were mainly psychiatric.

PHILLIPS: Psychiatric--

PARK: But TB's, I don't think they ever tried to escape.

PHILLIPS: How many people were in the psychiatric wards out there?

PARK: Well, let's see, one, two -- I think it was three wards. Of course, it varied. Three wards; I'd say 120. TB we had one, two, three, four, they had a lot of TB patients. Four -- that'd be 200. So many of them were there for such long periods of time.

PHILLIPS: With the psychiatric patients, how was it decided that they should stay in psychiatric wards at Ellis Island?

PARK: Well, some of them were seamen, some of them were Coast Guard. Some of them were immigration patients.

PHILLIPS: Because they weren't just immigrants; this was a psychiatric ward which was used by the City of New York?

PARK: No, not of the City. Merchant Seamen were taken care of.

PHILLIPS: Merchant Seamen.

PARK: Merchant Seamen. And Coast Guard. And government BEC cases.

PHILLIPS: Government what?

PARK: BEC--Bureau of Employees Compensation. A lot of them were there. But now, I don't think they provide medical care for any seamen, do they?. I don't think they do, since I don't think they have any hospital that will take them in.

PHILLIPS: Let's just a little bit perhaps go back before we finish talking, a bit more again about the specific kinds of foods that you fed. The people might be interested to know what the people on the Island ate. Give us, I suppose, a couple of menus that you can recall. Can you remember any particularly popular menus, or specific menus, or the Thanksgiving menu, maybe?

PARK: P-[not understood], same old thing. (laughs) Yes.

PHILLIPS: Same as you can expect at home -- cranberry sauce, and turkey and pumpkin pie--

PARK: Right. Turkey and mashed potatoes. They were very appreciative as a whole, the patients were. They really were. And since they had, in latter years, had a choice of menus.

PHILLIPS: How big was that choice, what range?

PARK: Well, usually -- maybe to begin with, soup or juice, two meats, potato, and a couple of vegetables, salad, couple of desert

PHILLIPS: Morning tea or afternoon tea?

PARK: Oh, they always had bedtime. I don't think they had morning. I don't recall morning or afternoon.

PHILLIPS: Well, what was bedtime?

PARK: Oh, about nine o'clock at night -- be milk, and maybe a half sandwich.

PHILLIPS: How about for children, young people? Did they receive special treatment?

PARK: We had very few children. Very few. Offhand, I can't remember any particular child.

Ned; See, if you give any questions to --- you can ask.

PHILLIPS: I don't think that there's anything else that I can think of --.

PARK: Well, I hope we've covered the --. Did you see this picture?

PHILLIPS: You have a book in front of you; perhaps you can tell us what the title is and who wrote it. People might be interested to know.

PARK: Okay.

PHILLIPS: It's called -

PARK: Foc's'les and Gloryhole

PHILLIPS: It's spelled F-O-C-'S-'L-E-S and Foc's'les and Gloryholes - and Grlryhole, rather --

Park: And Gloryhole, that's right.

PHILLIPS: -- by James

PARK: C. Healy.

PHILLIPS: H-E-A-L-E-Y and, excuse me if I must say, it was published by the Merchant Marine Publishers Association in New York in 1936. It includes--entering the profession of seafaring, and you said there's a lot about the hospital at Ellis Island.

PARK: Yeah. There is.

PHILLIPS: Where is--"The Health Hazards and Occupational Risks of the Shipping Industry?" Why is--perhaps you can tell us how that relates to Ellis Island, that particular book, for a researcher who may be interested.

PARK: Well, Dr. Jen gave me this book, as a gift. And it was his Ph.D.--that's how he got his Ph.D.

PHILLIPS: That's his thesis.

PARK: It's his thesis. And he used to come over every Sunday evening and conduct services down in the social hall for all the patients.

PHILLIPS: You mean he was a priest?

PARK: He was a--really, he was an Episcopalian. Originally, he was a Methodist, and when he got this job he decided he should be an Episcopal minister.

PHILLIPS: I see.

PHILLIPS: So he went back to New York and became an Episcopalian minister. But he was a very good friend of ours. The sick seamen on board, I don't know whether you want that or not.

PHILLIPS: Tell me how he related to Ellis Island, what was his connection to Ellis Island again, or--

PARK: The minister.

PHILLIPS: He was the minister, or a minister?

PARK: He was the Protestant minister.

PHILLIPS: He was the Protestant minister that used to visit the Island.

PARK: Every--during the week, and conducted services on Sunday.

PHILLIPS: I see. How many times during the week would he come?

PARK: Oh, sometimes every day.

PHILLIPS: Sometimes every day. And he would speak with you, the staff, and the people--the patients.

PARK: The patients, right.

PHILLIPS: And with the other immigrants.

PARK: Right, right.

PHILLIPS: And he was the only Protestant minister?

PARK: Well, once in a while there'd be someone else in his place, if he happened to be away. But they all came from Seamen's Church Institute.

PHILLIPS: The Seamen's Church Institute? What was that?

PARK: Well, it is no more. I guess they tore it down. It's a place where seamen could spend the night, get their meals, they had a lovely church there. So.

PHILLIPS: And you were going to read us something from that you thought was interesting? That may be of interest to us?

PARK: I don't know [not understood] it could be--. He tells about the United States Public Health Service. (clears throat) "The United States Public Health Service among other activities operates the marine hospitals throughout the country. And the clientele of the marine hospitals are in the majority of cases, merchant seamen." So that answers your question there about who the patients are. "During the year 1933, the total number of hospital relief days given to patients was

1,763,000, of which American seamen received 1,039,000, or 58.94% of the total. If we estimate the disease incidence from the number of hospital days required for treatment, venere-- venereal diseases head the list and tuberculosis a close second.

However, the number of men who fall victims to venereal disease is almost five times as great as those who are affected -- afflicted with tuber-tuber-culosis. This is true in the both the years 1930 and 31. We must remember only the men from the hospitals who are discharged as cured. To give the correct picture of incidence, we would need to know the actual number of patients suffering from each disease, in both years. Diseases of the ear, nose, and throat, and of the digestive system are, with the venereal disease, the leading three in the number of men afflicted and later discharged as cured." So.

PHILLIPS: And a lot of those men were recovering out on Ellis - they were all recovering on Ellis Island, is that right?

PARK: Yeah, right -- a lot of them -- Many of them.

END OF

INTERVIEW

NPS-155/PARK