

This is probably the best interview one can find!

---

**Interview of Mary Margaret Mullins Gordon by Janet Levine, April 24, 1998**  
*in collection North American Immigrant Letters, Diaries and Oral Histories*  
*(published by Alexander Street Press) held by Ellis Island Immigration*  
**Museum. Ellis Island Oral History Project**

---

-- [pp. 1] --

MARY MARGARET MULLINS GORDON

EI-996

MARY MARGARET MULLINS GORDON

BIRTH DATE: AUGUST 1, 1905

INTERVIEW DATE: APRIL 24, 1998

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 9/1998

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: MARY FLEMING, 7/1999

IRELAND, 1927

AGE 21

PASSAGE ON "THE ADRIATIC"

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: There appears to be the whistling sound of wind in the background on the tape. J. Levine.

LEVINE: Okay. This is April 24, 1998. And I am in Bridgeport, Connecticut, at the home of Mary Margaret Mullins Gordon.

GORDON: It's a bit long.

LEVINE: ( she laughs ) Who came from Ireland in 1927 at the age of twenty-one. She was about to turn twenty-two in a few months later. Today is April 24th, and Mrs. Mullins, uh, Mrs. Gordon is ninety-two years of age. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Well, I'm delighted to be here.

GORDON: I'm delighted to visit you, see you.

LEVINE: And, uh, I'm looking forward, because I know you have a lot to tell in your story. So if you would start at the beginning, give your birth date again for the tape, please.

GORDON: Well, I was born August 1, 1905, in Kent, England. My dad . . . Can I continue?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GORDON: My dad was in the service. He was a military man. And he was stationed in a camp called Shorncliff, if I can remember right, Shorncliff. And, uh, I was born while they were in camp, he was, his regiment was stationed there. And while I was still an infant, my father was sent to Ireland to, uh, called Birr barracks, which is in Offaly County. It's not too far from Dublin, I think, Offaly County, Birr. It's spelled B-I-R-R, small. And, uh, we lived in the barracks there. He was stationed in the

barracks. There was a big barracks. And, uh, we lived there for many years. My sisters, uh, took, my three brothers and two sisters were born in Birr barracks.

-- [pp. 2] --

LEVINE: Were you the oldest child?

GORDON: I was the oldest, yes. And we went to school there, and my father was, his job then, and, of course, that was in peacetime, was, uh, Sergeant of the Officer's Mess. He took care of the Officer's Mess and parties and all that kind of thing, you know? And, in the meantime, I went to school there. The school was a Protestant Church, which was divided. Half it was the school, and half it was the Protestant Church, because the Catholic church was in the town of Birr, and we lived up further from the town, a few miles up from Birr.

LEVINE: Were you a Catholic family?

GORDON: Yes. And, um, I, I had my schooling there, such as I remember it. And I do remember, I should bring this in, the airplanes that was in the war in those days, you know, there were little, like toys made of material, and I remember there was a lot of fields, like meadows, belonging to, uh, I guess it would belong to the town of Birr, and they had farmers living in parts, you know, of this, parts of the, uh, the fields there, they had like little farms. But those planes used to come in and land in the fields next to where our house was. And they were the pilots from the barracks, you know? And we were always let out of school to see the airplanes coming down. Oh, we were so thrilled, these airplanes were coming down, and they were just shaky little things, you know? And everything. I remember that so well. You know, when I tell that to some of the people they say, "Oh, you were only dreaming that. There was no airplanes in those days." But that was after World War One, you see.

-- [pp. 3] --

LEVINE: It was after World War One.

GORDON: Yes, it was after World War One. And they were, they used to land there, you know, and there were parts of the barracks that I can remember. And, uh, we, uh, we lived there up until 1914 when World War One broke out. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: Let me just go back for a minute before you continue with that part.

GORDON: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Um, what was your father's name?

GORDON: William. William Mullins.

LEVINE: And was your father born in Ireland?

GORDON: Yes. He was born in Cork City. And, in, I can go back a little?

LEVINE: Sure, uh-huh.

GORDON: While, uh, my father, as a matter of fact, my father was conscripted. Young men were conscripted because, as you know our, England was ruling Ireland at the time. And we had, the English government was into everything, and we had barrack, you see, the town I come from was a big barrack town, a big military town,

and it had different regiments of English soldiers there during all that time that I can remember. There was always regiments there.

LEVINE: Was this after Boer, or . . .

GORDON: This was before.

LEVINE: Before.

GORDON: Before. The barracks was always, always there. They had, as far as I can remember, it was always there, that I can remember. And, of course, when my father was a young boy, they conscripted the men for the Boer war, see? I'm trying to remember these things that I've been hearing about. And my father was conscripted. He was conscripted once and his mother got him out because he was the, I don't know, I can't remember now whether my father was the oldest, or whether his sister Margaret was the oldest, but it don't make any difference anyhow. She got him out because she was a widow. And she had, I guess, I don't know how many families she had at that time, because a couple of them died, and she got him out, but eventually he was conscripted again when, and he went, he was kept in, and he was in that regiment all the time till World War, after World War Two, after World War One, rather. I've seen so many wars that I get a little mixed up. And, uh, so, in the meantime, when my dad was in the World War, serving in the World War, my aunt, Margaret, who's his sister, his older sister, came to this country and she eventually sent for her mother and her sister and her brothers. And they were all over here during the Boer War, I guess, because my father was in the Boer War, then. So . . .

-- [pp. 4] --

LEVINE: He was the only one that wasn't over here.

GORDON: Yeah, yeah. So after the war was over, my father was sent back to Fermoy, where we come from, and he was stationed in one of the camps. I think it was called Moore[ph] Park. There was two camps there, Moore[ph] Park and Kilwood[ph], which are still there. And, uh, that's where he met my mother, through one of the men that he served with whose family lived next door to my mother, in Fermoy. So he met my mother there, and eventually, I guess, they courted and got married, and that was the end of him coming to this country.

LEVINE: ( she laughs ) I see. Did he ever talk about the Boer War? Did he ever tell you anything about . . .

GORDON: Not that I remember, not really that I remember. But, uh, I know he was there, yeah, but he was a young man. And, so when he got married, excuse me, when he married my mother, of course, the family, his family over here . . . ( she clears her throat ) Excuse me. ( she clears her throat ) Over here, didn't like the idea of him getting married and staying in Ireland. They thought surely after the war he'd come out there and come to them. They'd be all here together, because the whole family was there. So my Aunt Mame, it was her brother, she was, kind of took over the family, because Grandma was getting older, you know? And, uh, she resented the idea, because she always mentioned to me when I came over here, "You know, your dad would be over in America if he didn't marry your mother." ( they laugh ) And I said, "Well, he did marry her." And he never once felt like coming over here, you know? And, uh, as I say, we had a family. My mother had six children, three

boys and three girls. I was the oldest, then there was the three brothers, and my two younger sisters.

-- [pp. 5] --

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

GORDON: Margaret O'Connor. And she had three brothers. She was the only daughter, and she had three brothers. Well, uh, then when World War One, oh, let me see if I've missed anything there. Well, anyhow, there was a little bit of, uh, how would you say it, feelings that if my father hadn't got married he would have been in America. ( she laughs ) And, uh, the sad part of it all was my dad never saw any of his family. His mother died over here, and I remember, oh, they corresponded, I mean, and everything. They sent pictures here and photographs and all that sort of thing. But she always felt a little that, "If it wasn't for your mother my brother would be over here," you know? And all this sort of thing. That's what I heard when I came over here. "Well," I said, "my mother was a wonderful woman, and she brought six children into the world." And my dad seemed happy. And he had no, I never heard my father say that he would like to come to America. He just, that was his home, that was his family, and that's where he wanted to stay.

LEVINE: How would you describe your father, just, as a girl growing up, uh, in Ireland?

GORDON: Oh, yeah, you know, uh, I loved both my parents very much, but my father was, my father was a military man, and he was strict, very strict. He had, there was laws that, uh, in other words, which used to make me angry. He used to say, of course, now, I'm talking about, did I mention about World War One when he went in the service?

-- [pp. 6] --

LEVINE: Well, I'd like you to . . .

GORDON: We were coming to it, we're coming to it. Forget about the World War. I don't know too much about that. I'll only just tell you what I know. But anyhow, 1914, when the war broke out, in August 1914, we were still living in Birr barracks, of course. And, of course, when war was declared, my father led the regiment, was one of the first to leave the Birr barracks to go to France, and I remember that. I think I was nine years old, and there was two big squares, when I talked about squares, military squares where they used to, uh, perform drills. One was called Officer's Square, and the other was called the Soldier's Square, and there was, my mother and father, they were living in quarters. They were called the married quarters where the soldiers' families lived in there, and there was just a little separation, but you were in the barracks, which was surrounded, big wall, a big, high wall, and guards at the gates, and nobody could come in unless they had passes, and nobody could go out unless you had another pass to come back, and all that sort of thing that I remember. And, like I said, I went to school there, and, uh, my sisters and brothers were. But my younger sister, Kathleen, was born around the time that the war broke out in 1914. And my father had spent a lot of time more in the service already. And I think within a year or two or something, that I can remember, that he would, would you say, out of the service. But he wanted to go with his regiment. And my mother was heartbroken because she figured he had such a short time more in the service that he could stay with her. But, no, he had to go in the service. And I

remember when they were leaving to go to France at nighttime they had bonfires on the square, and I remember the rifles, the soldiers' rifles stacked up all around the square, you know, and every time one allotment would go, the band would go with them down to the railway station, which was quite a few, about, I'd say about five miles, guessing, five miles from the barracks to the railroad station. And I remember that, how my mother felt, and I remember my mother crying and all that sort of thing. And, you know, I grew up with a lot of these men that were in the regiments, my father's regiment, and they were, like, we all knew one another, and I was just a kid, you know, and everything, and most of them were killed, and they were the first. My father was in France the entire war. He had, I remember when he had his first leave. Two, he got six days. You got out of the trenches the way you were. Now, this is the truth, I remember this. You got out of the trenches, and when he wrote to my mother he told her about when he was leaving, and she'd meet him at the railroad station. We were all excited, my father was coming home, and you know how kids are. And, anyhow, uh, when he was supposed to get to the station, he didn't show up, and my mother had to make two trips in the one day up to the station in Fermoy. So he didn't come, and we were all upset. And at that time I didn't tell you that we were living in my mother's, uh, mother's home, and she had one brother that never married. He was the youngest, my uncle Maurice. He was our father, took the place of our father, while my father was in France, because we stayed in their house, because we had to leave the barracks when all the, the, uh, regiments had left, all the married women had to go to their homes or find other places to live, and my mother come up to Fermoy to be with, to live with her brother, and he took over, and we lived there till my dad, till the war was over and my dad came home for good, until my mother got her own home. And that was that, backed up. But, anyhow, continuing about, uh . . .

-- [pp. 7] --

LEVINE: Your father going to France, and . . .

GORDON: Yes. And, when he got home, the only, the only news you got from France at that time, my mother wrote to him constantly and used to send packages to him, and, uh, like Oxo cubes, eggs packed in oatmeal, socks, socks and scarves we used to knit, and things like that, because they needed that stuff, you know? And she'd no sooner get one package down in her grocery store and fixed up to them and said that she'd pack another one to go after that because it took, you know, a long time. Well, anyhow, uh, in the meantime, uh, as I say, my mother come up to, uh, to Fermoy to live in her family home, and, uh, my, let's see now, I have to gather my senses there, I sometimes forget a little.

LEVINE: You were saying that your father was supposed to come home . . .

GORDON: Oh, yes. He was on his way home, and he didn't arrive, and we were all upset, we didn't know what happened and all this sort of thing, and we didn't know, what we knew was my dad was coming home, and that was it. My mother was so excited. Finally around, I think it was twelve or one o'clock in the morning, we were all in bed, and a knock came to the door, and my uncle came down the stairs from his bedroom, and I remember he opened the door, and there was my father. He had a very hard time getting to, getting away to get, because he was a soldier, he had his rifle with him. The very way he come out, I can remember that so well, and he looked so dilapidated, he had two days coming, two days at home, and two days to go back. It was hardly worth his while to come home, because we felt worse when he went back. And I remember, oh, it shook my mother up. My poor mother went

through a lot. And, uh, when he went back into, the thing was, he had to go back. You know, in those days, if you didn't go back and, say, deserted, when you were caught you were shot. In those days they shot you. Of course, they don't do it now. I don't think they do it now. I don't know.

-- [pp. 8] --

LEVINE: Did you ever hear of such an instance?

GORDON: Well, I heard talk about it, but I didn't hear of anybody from our town. But my father said by staying and delaying, you were taking away from another man that has to go on a holiday like you. And you took what you got. So when he was, of course, he felt better when he went back, but he felt worse leaving us, and my mother used to say, "I wouldn't mind if he was able to write a good letter and explain what he was doing and where he was and when he, when he'd think the war was going to be over," but all that was crossed out. She used to get a letter sometimes, my father might say something, censored. And anything she, you know, she wrote that gave any news about what was going on in Fermoy with the, being it was a military town, that was censored. And in between these letters and things like that, there was a card that was, it was specially made by the government, that my father could send, in the meantime, if he was going into the trenches. And all it, and it was printed on there, "I am well. Hope to hear soon." And a couple of, that's all you got. And my mother used to hate those cards. She used to say by the time he got to mail them, he could have been killed. And another thing, I used to go down to the post office, our post office, and they'd put, every morning they'd have notifications up who was wounded, who was dead, and, oh, my mother wouldn't go down. And I used to go down there and look up, see, and I'd come home to my mother, my father's name wasn't there, and all this sort of thing. And that's the way my mother went. And she had an awful time. She was heartbroken. And six children, you know? And, uh, anyway, uh . . .

-- [pp. 9] --

LEVINE: What was it like for you to be living with your grandmother and your uncle?

GORDON: When I came over here?

LEVINE: No, when you were, uh, staying . . .

GORDON: Well, my, no, my grandmother was dead, and my grandfather. My uncle, it was fine. He took very good care of us, and, uh, we didn't want for anything. But, of course, my mother was always worried, and she had her crying spells and things like that. And he was very strict. He was just like a father. I think he was stricter than my father. And he was a very, how would I say it, he wasn't an over-religious man, but he was a good man in that line. You went to church, and you went to your sacraments, and you do it because I'm your daddy, while I'm taking care of you, you know? ( she laughs )

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

GORDON: But he took good care of us and everything. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: Did the war make a difference in Fermoy? I mean, did it affect people in their everyday lives?

GORDON: Well, you know, there was always a little bit of, that was when the Sinn Fein business was starting up. Because, uh, now, I've got to collect my thoughts here, because you get a little jumbled up between World War One and World War Two, because, but World War One was connected with my dad, and we were living in the barracks, and that's what I'm trying to remember all the things that I can remember, because after all I was only nine years old, and being the oldest of the family, and I, there was things that stuck with me, you know, that, uh, and I probably forgot a lot of things, too. But, finally, let's get my dad back for good. When the war was over, oh, in the meantime, my father was missing for a while, and I have a funny recollection about that, because my mother sure thought he was dead. She couldn't get no information, because they said, everything was so kind of upset that a lot of men were missing that wasn't found for a long time. But it turned out that my father had been wounded, and he was sent to England after a spell in France, in the hospital in France, and he was sent to, I'm trying to remember the name of the town he was in there. Eventually my mother, my mother was sure he was dead, when she wasn't getting no information through any regulations or anything. So, anyhow, my, she gets a letter one day, and the mailman, she couldn't open the letter because the letter wasn't in my father's handwriting. It was in a woman's handwriting. My mother couldn't open it. She went across the street to her neighbor. She said, "Mrs. Roche, please open that. I just got this, and I don't know who it's from. I'm afraid to open it." And Mrs. Roche, she was a neighbor across the street, she opened it up, and she says, "Oh," she says, "it's from Bill, your husband. The nurse wrote the letter." My father had been wounded. In Yam[ph], or something. I know he had two gold stripes, that's because he was wounded, on his uniform. And that was the first news she got from him. And a picture taken of the outside of the window of the room he was in. Well, everything was happy and glorious in our house, and he said that he was being sent to, uh, someplace in Tipperary, I think it was Tipperary, and he would be in a hospital there for a while, that would be in Ireland. And my mother did go to see him, and he was there for a little while. And finally he came back. Now, this is funny. The first time I saw my dad after he was coming back, through all this, he was coming back for good, because he would be out of the service soon, and my father always had a moustache. The men all had moustaches in those days. And I was so used to my father with a moustache. ( she laughs ) When he came in to our door, my father had no moustache. Oh, he wasn't my father. He was not my father. He didn't even look like my father. And I wouldn't go near him. And I, my father and I were very, being I was the oldest, you know, I had a lot of feelings for my dad, being he was away and maybe get killed, and I used to think of this at night and all these things, you know? And when I saw my father without the moustache, I said, "No way. He was not my father." And finally, anyhow, he never looked the same to me. But he never grew that moustache after that. And they used to laugh about the whole thing, you know? Then, that was the end of that. The war was over. Then, of course, trouble was beginning to start in Ireland, Shin Fein. This is the original Shin Fein that got together, and I don't know how all this started, like, it was brewing, in other words. And then we had the 1916 rebellion in, uh, in Ireland, you know? That was . . .

-- [pp. 10] --

LEVINE: The Easter . . .

GORDON: The Easter Rebellion. I was, I think, uh, I'd say I was eleven years old then, because this was brewing, like after the, uh, the First World War. That's when all that Shin Fein started. And, of course, there was trouble from then on, and they

were arrested, those that were arrested in the 1916 riots, and a lot of them were executed, which was causing an awful lot of trouble home. And from then on that I can remember, there was trouble. And we still had all the English regiments in Fermough. And, of course, there was an awful lot of, uh, how would I say it, things were different, and you done what the government done, and, see, the people in Fermough had nothing to say about it, and that was that. And then it got very, certain things used to happen, like I do remember we had a fesh one Sunday. A fesh is like, it's called an Irish concert, and they have them here every year in different places. And, uh, it was held on the college grounds. And, uh, St. Coleman's College. And St. Coleman's College was directly across the street from my uncle's house. It was around the whole block, a big college. And it would run right down into the town, practically. And there was, it was a big wall, you know, enclosing the college and the churches and the parade grounds and everything, and they had a lot of students from out of town and from the town that lived there, and some of them came from other cities and far away, and they used to have big hurling matches and everything. Well, they had this big doing this day there, and they had big banners across the street, you know, we did, the town did, announcing that there was this big fesh, and all the people used to go. There were all kinds of bands and refreshments and, and dancing and things like that that went on. It was beautiful. It was in summer. And, uh, when the soldiers were let out for the afternoon, that was their time out around the town to come out, you know, and, uh, we had the Air Force, the Air Force. They wore blue uniforms, each Air Force, and we had the artillery regimens there, and we had the Shropshire regiment in the other barracks, see? The artillery regiment rode on horses around the town. And, anyway, uh, all the soldiers came up and pulled the banners off of the streets, you know, from across the streets, like to decorate the streets. And they pulled them down. And I remember myself and my brothers were already in the grounds of the college. And, oh, there was a terrible going on, screaming and yelling and carrying on. And they tried to get in through the big doors. There was doors in different entrances into the college grounds. And, uh, but I can remember now, us kids were having a great time. We didn't know what was going on. We thought it was part of the party. And all this was going on on the outside. And there was clashes and fighting and windows were broken, shop windows were all broken, merchandise was all out on the street. And that happened twice, in two different regiments. And, of course, we had a lot of these, uh, country boys that was, that were in college, going the college, and they were great hurlers, you know, footballers, and they tried to get out over the walls while the police were trying to keep them on the inside not to get out and, you know. But they got out, and there was murder out in the street. And I remember my mother and some of her friends came down the hill from, it was on a hill, lived on the hill, and it came down, and they couldn't get in, and we couldn't get out. And all this was going on inside, and fighting on the outside, and they were trying to get in. And, oh, it was, on a Sunday, it was terrible. But, anyhow, it was, the MP's came down, and the wagons came down and took all the soldiers back, and they were kept in barracks for a whole week. They weren't left out. Then another time, now, I don't know whether it was a year later or two years later, we, uh, ran into another thing, not in the college grounds, but on the town. And when they got drunk some of these soldiers, you know, started arguing with the townspeople, you know how things happen. They broke up the town again. Broke all the windows and shoes and clothes and groceries and all scattered all around the town grounds again. And the first two that started that were sent back to England, and then they sent another regiment in their place which done the same thing. That was the Buff[ph] regiment. I can't remember the names, though. And they were sent back again. Well, things didn't get any better. By that time, of course, my father was out of the service. And, uh, there

was no work to be done. Things were in a very bad way, and the Shin Fein business was, uh, going on and there were killing. And then the first thing you know we had, Black and Tans were sent from England over to Ireland, and that was terrible. They were the awfulest people. They were, all they did was sashay around the town. They took over the hotel on the square that, there were two big hotels there, one facing the river, Blackwater, which ran through our towns, a famous river, and they took that over, and they done what they wanted in the town. And it got to the point Marshall law was declared. And, uh, you couldn't be out on the, outside your doors six o'clock in the evening. It was in the summer, too. And I remember that so well. You couldn't go to a movie in the evening. But, uh, you had to have, behind your door, on the inside, everyone, everyone had it, you had to have the names of the whole family who was living there, or anybody that was staying with you. And when, every once in a while they'd come, probably ever week, that I can remember, the soldiers would come up in these lorries up the streets, during Marshall law, to catch anybody that was out on the street.

-- [pp. 11] --

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

GORDON: And sometimes they'd come and knock at different doors. And I had a habit of going to my girlfriend's, because, just down, two doors down the street. And sometimes these lorries, we'd call them lorries, would come earlier and come down different streets, you see? And there wouldn't be only one. There'd be half a dozen of these lorries. And God forbid if you were caught out on the street. But anyhow, uh . . .

LEVINE: Were you ever caught?

GORDON: Oh, no. My father saw to, oh, I'll tell you an incident about that. But there was, it was always this, this, "Get in the house, get the children in the house, get in the house." And it was terrible to be in the house in the summertime with the shades down and everything. And all this stuff was going on, you could hear the lorries going up the roads to Cork[ph] behind our house, and they're screaming and yelling. And, oh, Lord, and not only in the day, but at nighttime. And my mother was a nervous wreck when any of us was out to get in the house before, because some of us didn't realize that you had to be in your house. But if they, if the officers came into your house and went through your house and looked, the first thing they'd do was looked at and counted who was in the house. Before my mother, we used to come into the kitchen. And if somebody was missing, "Where is so and so, what are they doing out? Where are they right now?" And, you know, the officers were very cocky, these officers.

-- [pp. 12] --

LEVINE: Did they come into your house?

GORDON: Oh, are you kidding? Yes, into the house. My mother used to stand up to them. ( she laughs ) My mother, I think my mother was such a brave woman. And my father, of course, knew the whole thing, and being he was an ex-soldier and spent so many years in the English Army and fought for that country, it didn't mean a thing. And my father had a regimental box which was his property. And all the

soldiers had them, you know, to keep at the foot of their bed when they're in the service. Well, you can get, you take that home with you when you're out. And all his, he used to have uniforms and the things, the medals that he got, were kept in that box in his bedroom. And I remember one officer, a young fellow, come in there, I just barely remember that, and he, oh, he had to go through all our rooms. And my mother's . . . ( she laughs ) I remember my mother standing at the kitchen table, and she's looking across at my father, and she said, "You go upstairs and see what's going on there." So my father went upstairs, and they went right through my father's box. They were on the verge of taking the whole thing, down the stairs, and my father said, "Stop right there." And I remember that I used to be so scared, and my father got into an argument with the officer there. He said, "That box is my property, and I fought for that. I fought for your country," he said, "and that's my belonging. It's not leaving my bedroom." And they were insistent. My mother butt in. My mother said, "Get out of my house. My children are nervous wrecks, and you get out of my house this very minute, or I'll throw something at you." With that, they went and opened the back door off the kitchen and looked all around the backyard. We had big long gardens out in the backyard, and any sheds were there, they were looking. They were looking for rifles, because a lot of, uh, fighting and killings were going on were supposedly done with men with uniforms, and they thought that maybe some of the ex-soldiers were wearing their uniforms and joining the Shin Fein. That's what we thought. Because my father wasn't involved in Shin Fein. But you never knew what time there was a knock at your door. Not that we had anything to hide. But during all that time, I made my sacrament of Confirmation. And, uh, oh, they let up on the, uh, on the, uh, when you had to be in the house, Marshall, what do you call it, Marshall law. And we were confirmed. The bishop come to our church, and we were, oh, we had a big, big Confirmation day, boys and girls. And in order that we could go and see a movie, the movie houses gave a matinee for the children so they'd be in in the evening and they wouldn't be out in the street when Marshall law came at six o'clock. And after everything was, we all got our Confirmation, and after we came home and had lunch, a quick lunch. And we were, my father sat me down ( she laughs ) at the table and said, "I want you here. Don't go over the bridge to the movie house over the bridge." Because the barracks was all up at that side, you see. And if we didn't get out of the road, get home quick, the lorries would overtake you. And you had no business on the street after six o'clock. So I promised, oh, when I promised him, you know how when you're young you promise all kinds of things, I was going to the movies, and that was it. So he said, "Go to the movies on the river side," at our side, which I'd only have a hill to run up. Well, wouldn't you think I was so smart. All the girls and the rest of us were so smart alecks, we went to the further one over the other end, and we just dillied and dallied after the movies, you know, having a great time with our holiday, and we was halfway home and the lorries come, Baooh . . . And by the time I got up the hill to get up the hill to my house, there was just another girl who lived on the same street as me at that time, the others scattered around, we could see the lorries passing us this way, and on our hill was the entrance into the college. One side was the college and into one side of our church, you could go in for a ways to church. And in below that was a convent belonging to the nursing sisters. They were nuns, and they were called The Blue Nuns because they wore a bright blue, when they were in the convent they wore a bright blue veil. But when they came to visit the sick, you know, they wore the regular veil. And they had, they had a beautiful gate there that went in, you know, like, went in like this, like a saucer, and it had a big star on it. It was painted white, and they had a big gold, oh, a huge, big gold star. And I remember, me and the girlfriend, we sat in the grove so that we, they wouldn't see us if they come down that hill. Oh, I'm telling you, and I was more afraid of my father. I thought,

"What were you thinking?" I was warned not to do this, not to do that. So we finally, when we, she said, "I'm going to go home." She lived at the end of my street, and I lived at the other end. Wouldn't you know it? When I got up to my father's house, right inside the door my father was standing. ( she laughs ) And he pulled me in the door, and he just looked at me. He had his glasses on the end of his nose. He just looked at me. Oh, and these were Black and Tans. They weren't the original, the regular soldiers, the Black and Tans. And, oh, I didn't know what, and my poor mother was upstairs, and she come running down the stairs. She would have walloped me right there, because I did her, my father would never hit you, but he took away from you something that you wanted. Well, I got the biggest lecture of my life. My father said to me, finally he said to me, "You know, Maizie," he said to me, they called me Maizie for short, "If you were caught out there and pulled into that lorry, I'd hate to think what would have happened to you." But these were sent over from England. Some of them were out of jail. They were just scum, really the scum, even the soldiers didn't like them. And they were sent over there to try to quell the Shin Fein, and they were the ones who were doing most of the shooting and most of the killing. And, oh, you know, that, that was really scared me to death. And my poor mother, it's a wonder she didn't die. And those were the incidents that you remember that, there was always something going on. There was always, you heard rifle fire at night, and you didn't know where, you heard trees being felled across the road, because the Cork Road, it was the traffic from Fermough to Cork City, and that was way back from our house, you know? Way in the back you could hear all the trucks. That was going on, all night you heard that, all night. And all this screeching and yelling. And in the meantime a lot of the men that we knew, and boys that had joined the Shin Fein, that were neighbors of ours, and, were on the run. They couldn't stay home, or they'd been arrested. And they were always, that was what they were doing, coming into the houses to see if they could find some of them, come home and were sleeping or something, you know, catch them at home. And they were doing all these sneaky things, you know, trying to find out who was home, and who, and they used to question us children on the streets. I remember we used to go up to the woods, and we used to, kids, you know, like to go through the woods. We had beautiful woods over there. And we used to pick blackberries and things, and all that sort of stuff. And we were always warned to get into a field if we saw any lorries coming, not to show yourself. But we would go through the Fermough woods, which went in one side in Fermough and out at the other side. It was a big woods (?). And us kids used to go in there, and the soldiers would be outside with these trucks there, lorries out there, sitting down smoking, you know? And they'd see us all coming out, and we'd have blackberries and, picking blackberries, and they'd say, "Any more men in there?" They would question us, you know? So, we were kids, we didn't know for nothing. And, uh, they'd say, "Did you meet any boys, any men in there that you knew?" And, "How many are there there?" And we used to say, "Oh, yes, we saw men in there, but some of them were farmers who had their farms there, that they had their cattle in the fields next to." And, of course, that was the ones we were telling them about. But they didn't want to hear that. They wanted, if anybody was camping in there in the thick woods. They wouldn't go in, though. And we, and they'd say, "I'll give you sixpence," the officers would say, "I'll give you sixpence," which was a lot of money to a kid in those days. And we'd all laugh, because we, at that time we were a little wise, you know, and we were always warned not to give information, which we didn't know much anyhow. And, uh, oh, they used to get so mad at us. And they'd be walking up and down there, but they never went, that I know of, they never went into the woods. But I never, we never did see anybody in there, but we used to laugh as much and say, "Yeah, there were." We were nasty kids. But, anyhow, uh, all that sort of thing went

on, you know, until, uh, oh, it was right. But we were so happy that my dad came home. But eventually, uh, then Michael Collins, the Free State. Poor Michael Collins. He, uh, started the Free State business. And, of course, up to the present day, that's what the whole problem is. And the Free, before, oh, before that the Shin Fein took over the barracks. The soldiers were all evacuated out of there, because the people in Ireland then didn't want them. There was all kinds of goings on, get them out of Ireland, get the English out of Ireland, the war was over, and this and that. And I remember all that parading. And I also remember when we used to go picking blackberries, we used to see all these civilians in these fields with guns. And, you know, we thought this was great watching. And we never said anything about it. And we were never told not to say anything about this. But, of course, this was after, before the English were all evacuated out of, well, out of our town, anyhow. And, uh, one day I heard my father talking to my mother, and I heard him say that trouble was brewing, and little odds and ends. You weren't allowed to hang around when anyone was talking, you know, in those days. Kids today can stand and watch what's going on, but we weren't allowed that. But we, uh . . . ( she laughs ) My mother could, she says, "Enough of trouble, there is enough of trouble in Ireland now." But it got worse. And, uh, then there was kidnapping, and they kidnapped an English general. What the heck was his name? And there was big signs up around, and they were going to vow vengeance on anybody they arrested, didn't make any difference whether they were in the Shin Fein or not, until he was set free. But he was set free eventually. Lucas, General Lucas was his name. Funny, I can remember his name. And he was set free, but he said he was treated fine, and that he wasn't threatened or anything. And, uh, everything, and they thought maybe he was dead already, you know? And they were causing, the soldiers, the government was causing an awful lot of trouble. They were arresting all kinds of men. As a matter of fact, my father was, he wasn't actually arrested, but he was, his name was come up with a lot of the townsmen there, and especially any soldiers that had been in the English Army, and they had to go down to the end of the town where the courthouse was, and there was, one of the big windows. Whoever was inside those, that window, you had to pass by. You had to pass and stand there and answer questions, and this, that and the other thing. But you didn't see who you were talking to. My father could never figure out what that was for, but there was a reason for that. But in the meantime, in dribs and drabs, the soldiers would be sent back to England, and, of course, Shin Fein continued. And then they took over the barracks after the English, the Shin Fein took over the barracks, the Republican Army. And, uh, of course, I will say the English soldiers brought a lot of business to the towns, you know, when they were there. They drank a lot in the pubs, you know? There was always plenty of pubs around, and lots of businesses, and the bakery businesses, and, uh, all that sort of thing. And, uh, finally, anyhow, when Michael Collins, the Free State, come into order, the Shin Fein were still living in these barracks. So when the news came that Michael Collins was marching, and his men were coming into these, taking over these barracks, the Shin Fein, the Republican Army, burned the barracks down. And they were burning, oh, for weeks and weeks. And I remember the big archway in one of the barracks squares had a great, big clock, a huge clock. And was, we used to make bets on when it was going to fall out. It had been burning, it was hanging out. And the kids used to make bets, "Oh, it's going to fall down tomorrow." It took months, nearly almost a year, before it actually fell out. It was hanging out. But eventually the Free State came there, and, of course, then they were fighting with the Shin Fein. The Shin Fein didn't want them there, and they didn't want to have anything to do with Michael Collins and his regiment. So they brought a little peace to the, and they kind of went to the camps around there and stayed there. And what I can remember, there was still a lot of fighting going on, and Michael Collins. So,

uh, he was, he was a good man, and I think, as they all say today, if he had been living today with this peace going on, I think he'd have a big say in that, and he may have been able to, uh, bring peace in a better way, or get factions together and maybe make peace. And they think, well, he was the one that brought some kind of order, because they're still the, you know, the, they're still over there in Fermough, but they're in the camps there, and we still have a Free State. And, of course, I remember when Michael Collins was shot. It was on the border from, it was in Cork, and, uh, I was reading something in one of my books there that Michael Collins, and they still think, some people think that he wasn't actually shot by one of the, it was an accident. They, the story comes out that, I think maybe it was hoping that it wasn't one of his men that killed him, that he could have been shot accidental.

-- [pp. 13] --

LEVINE: Do you have an opinion?

GORDON: I don't know, I think he was shot. Because they did not like when him and, who was the other man to settle this peace in Ireland, to get the North of Ireland and the South of Ireland free? Well, they (?) we'd get peace and that we'd be free, you know, everything would be free. That was the whole idea of him going with this, I forget who the other man went with, Michael Collins. And I forget some of them. Every once in a while these names come to me. Well, anyway, when he didn't get the, he'd done the best he could for Ireland at that time. And, of course, the Shin Fein didn't like the idea. They figured they should have gotten, the whole of Ireland should have been freed. Of course, in the meantime, the South of Ireland is a republic, it's a republic, and that's free, you know? And, uh, but, uh, a lot of people think that's why he was shot, because they weren't satisfied with the outcome of that meeting up in the North of Ireland, or wherever they went. But there was always, there was always factions and fighting and shooting and, it was a very bad time, a very, very bad time.

LEVINE: Do you think it affected you personally in any ways?

GORDON: It affected my dad in a lot of ways, because he couldn't get, he couldn't get any work, hardly any work. But he had a pension from the service that helped out.

LEVINE: Why couldn't he get work at that time?

GORDON: There was no work. Work was very, very slow. You got maybe two days. It reminds you something of the, of the, uh, Depression we had here. My husband, when I got married, he got two days, maybe one week, maybe a week in a month. He had to take what he'd get. And nobody had anything. Like, uh, things were very bad at that time, very bad. Now everything has changed. They say Ireland is coming back to what she should be. And, uh, it's, it's a lovely country, it's a beautiful country. Not because I'm Irish I'm saying so. And, uh, it's a shame that there's so much blood spent in that country. And it's such a small country, you know what I mean? That you'd think it would, peace, people would get, but these people don't, these factions, they want things their own way, and one's fighting this way, and, of course, there's religion involved in there. And, uh, and, of course, the North of Ireland was never good to the Catholic people. They're in the majority up there, the, the, uh, other side, and there was always fighting back and forth in Ireland. One religion got into it, and I don't know. It's really very sad, a sad thing. It's sad, think about it. All these things, and for a small country, so much blood's been shed for it,

and still they're holding onto it. And, you see, and I think, I'm hoping, and I talked with my friends here, and, uh, oh, peace is going to be in the North of Ireland, and this, that and the other thing, and some of them over here, and the president getting involved to do his bit. And I know they had peace before and then broke it again. And you know all those young children growing up there? All they see, like when I grew up, all these soldiers out on every corner of your house, every corner of your town, and involvement and everything, and the kids see all this, they think that, they think it's part of their life, you know, it makes it tough, you know? It's a bad way to be. It's bad for the children, the grown-ups, and everything. All that unnecessary killing and shooting and all this sort of thing. I don't know. The world goes crazy. But, uh, anyway, uh, getting back to, then finally my, uh, father's family kept asking for me to come over to the States. You know, I was the oldest and, of course, we were all grown up then. And, uh, my mother didn't care for the idea of me leaving home, but they kept, and especially my grandmother wanted to see one of the family, one of the grandchildren, other than having pictures. And it was going on for a long time, until finally my father said, "Well, you're old enough." At that particular time I was going steady with a boyfriend, a boy from our town, and I didn't want to leave him, and I could hear all this talk going on. My grandmother, my aunts wanted me to come over there. And I wanted to see America, I didn't want to see America, and I used to hear my dad and mother always talking about it. And I, then, in the meantime, there was girls that I went to school with leaving for America. Some of them had come over here before me, and some of the boys had left, and, uh, we, they used to get letters from home, they said they liked it over here, but they were lonesome, and all this sort of thing. So finally it come to pass that, it was settled that I was going to come to America. And being the oldest in the family, my mother depended on me a lot, too, you know? And she wanted me to make something of myself, and, you know, help out at home, and my father was all for me going, so it was settled. I was leaving in June, and all the preparations were made for me. And I was excited, and I wanted to go, and I didn't want to go. You know, I was at the age when, oh, America, and see the Statue of Liberty, and, oh, all this sort of thing. The girls that I went to school with that didn't go said, "Oh, why don't you go?" Why . . . all sort of things. So finally I made my mind up, and the morning came that I was leaving for, uh, for Queenstown. This is now Cobv, Cobv. And, uh, my mother didn't come to Queenstown. I was going to be there a few days before I sailed. And, uh, my uncle, my father came with me, that was it. Then my mother and my uncle, and I forget who it was in the family, came a few days later before I sailed, and we stayed there in, uh, a boarding house who was run by a family, one of the girls that used to go with me to Presentations Convent, they grew up, they moved to Queenstown and opened up a bar and the boarding house. And people even come in, there was three or four of those places there. And it was right on the key, you could see the ocean, you know? But, of course, the ship that took me didn't come into the, into the port, because the shallow water, you see? We had to go out in a tender. And I remember that day, I can still remember what my mother wore.

-- [pp. 14] --

LEVINE: What did she wear?

GORDON: I can still remember my mother. My mother wore, I remember her, she wore a tan, full coat, and she had a tan hat with a little orange rose on the front of it, a tiny rose on the front of it. And she, uh, very, very upset. She was very upset about me leaving when it came to the point. So we all got on the tender to take us out to the boat, to the ship, rather, and, uh, my mother, my father and my uncle,

and there was somebody else there, I can't remember, with one of my aunts. And, uh, the band was playing, and I thought my mother was never going to let me go. And finally I found myself up on the ship looking down at the tender, and I heard my mother's last words, she said, "If you don't like America, let us know, and we'll bring you back right away." And that was the last words I heard my mother. And, uh, my father, he cried, too. And, uh, by the time, when I saw the tender moving, going back, and then the ship started going a little later, and I kind of got involved in the ship and what was going on and meeting people there and everything, and, uh, there was, before I left home, there was, my neighbors, my neighbors up the street had one brother who lived here in Connecticut. He was, he was a, he was a sailor at one time, and he lived here in Connecticut, but he was home, he went home for his vacation, and he was there for about three months in Ireland. And he was coming back on the same ship that I was coming back on. And, of course, my father, they got acquainted, and everything they told him about me, my mother and father were a little worried about me being alone, not knowing anybody. Never was away from my home. I was going to be with all these strangers, and common to strangers, my father's family. All I knew about them was their pictures on the wall, their photographs and everything. But my father got talking to him, and he said, he asked him would he keep his eye on me, you know? And, of course, I had met him, too, you know, and he said, "Oh, sure," he'd watch over me and everything. But when I got on the ship, I didn't see him getting on the ship, and I didn't see him on the ship for a while, and I got very sick the next day. ( she laughs ) Seasick. We could still see the, part of the shores of Ireland as you moved out. And we were trying to get acquainted, and I got very, very sick, very seasick. I wasn't the only one, of course. And I remember him coming, I was sitting down on a chair, on the lounge chairs there, and, oh, I didn't care if I die. And he come over to me, and for a minute I forgot who he was. And I was sick for, by that time I was sick for about three days, really sick. I wouldn't care if I fell overboard. And I didn't, and all they gave you was biscuits, hard biscuits like dog biscuits, ( she laughs ) to chew on, because that was supposed to do something to your insides. And you weren't eating because you couldn't eat, and around eleven o'clock or around noon time the waiters would come down by, you know, and they'd have soups or whatever you'd want on them, and they'd go right by you, and you'd smell the smell of that soup, and, oh, Lord. And all these, these things I remember. And, uh . . . ( she laughs ) When this man comes to me, I looked up at him, and I didn't, I was so sick I didn't recognize him. And he said, "Oh," he said, "come with me." So he took me up and I could hardly stand I was so weak, and he took me into the bar on the ship, one of the bars on the ship, and he sat me up on this big stool, and the barman, he said something to the barman about me being so sick, and he said, "You stay right there." And he stood right beside me, and the barman went and got something, he got a big glass. And I don't know what he put into that glass, but it was brown. And it was about, I thought he was giving me some liquor to drink. And I'm looking at him, and he kept saying, "Drink it, now, drink it, drink it." And he was over the bar, and I said, "Oh, I don't drink liquor, I don't drink liquor." And he said, "Come on, that's going to make you well." I had to drink every bit of it, and I know it tasted terrible, and I thought I was going to be three times sicker, so they made me stay there for a half an hour sitting on that thing. And he went off someplace, and the barman went on, and I'm sitting there, all the men and people sitting there drinking and wondering what a young girl is sitting up there with a glass in front of her. And I drank it all down, and, you know, it cured me? Whatever was in that, I remember, when I wrote home and told my father about it, it was, he said he, that's what he was worried about, my getting seasick. But, uh, whatever was in it, it made me better. The rest of the time I enjoyed the rest of my trip.

-- [pp. 15] --

LEVINE: Okay. We're going to pause here because we're at the end of the tape.

GORDON: We are.

LEVINE: And then we will put in another tape.

GORDON: Good.

LEVINE: And resume the story.

GORDON: I hope what I'm telling . . .

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: This is the beginning of Tape Two. I'm talking with Mary Margaret Mullins Gordon, and we were talking at the end of the last tape about how you got over your seasickness.

GORDON: Oh, yes, yes, yes. Then when we landed in New York . . .

LEVINE: Okay. Do you remember coming into New York?

GORDON: Oh, yes. Oh, everybody was on deck. And, naturally. And, uh, I was feeling pretty good at the time, and I got to know a lot of the boys and the girls on there. And, by the way, coming over, after I was feeling better, we had a great time on the boat because everybody had some kind of an instrument with them, an accordion, fifes and things, all kinds of different musical things. And we used to dance and sing, a lot of fun. And the ones up in the high class place used to be looking out all the railings down at us. So it was kind of nice by the time the ship got into, uh, into the port, into New York. And, oh, the first, I thought was so hot. Is this on?

LEVINE: Yes.

GORDON: It was so hot, it was, I just thought I'd never stand it. Of course, the clothes that I had over the clothes were suited to my, Ireland, because Ireland's climate is different to the climate over here. And I thought when I got up on that boat, I was all dressed, you know, to get on the tender, and we had our bags and our purse, and, oh, Lord, everybody was complaining about the heat. The sun was so hot. I couldn't stand it. So, anyhow, then another thing, what got me, which I thought was, oh, was like fairyland. All the cars were going, you could see the cars on the thruways, you know, going. All, oh, my God America's full of cars. Where are they all going? You know, everybody was, everything. And the Statue of Liberty, and, oh, I heard about the Statue of Liberty when we were in school, you know, and all that. And, to see it, to actually see it from the direction, oh, my goodness, oh, I couldn't wait to write home. So, anyhow, we had to get off of the ship, and we were put on a tender, which took us across to Ellis Island. And when I saw Ellis Island, it's a great big place, I wondered what we were going to do in there. And we all had to get out of the tender, and then into this, and gather your bags in there, and the place was crowded with people and talking, and crying, people were crying. And we passed, go through some of the halls there, and tried to remember that the halls, big

halls, big open spaces there, and there was bars, and there was people behind these bars, and they were talking different languages, and I was scared to death. I thought I was in jail. And nobody knew, you know, of course, they said you were all right and all this, and you had to go to be examined by the doctor. We all stood in a big line, men and women, and, you know, bag alongside you, men and women, that I can remember, and gradually each one went into this little room. It was a funny shaped, a little corner room, where the doctor was there, and there were one or two nurses, at least there was one nurse there. And there was just about room for the thing they put you up on, and, for to get around. And you had to strip down. They went through all your, you know, you just done what you were told to do. If I was back home, I'd never leave. All I had to go, that was my feelings, that was my feelings. Oh, you know, and you don't know who to ask. I was kind of, uh, timid to ask. But, of course, it was all right. It was all for our welfare. Finally when we had to get dressed, and you come out, somebody else goes past you. It could be a man, or it could be a woman, and you grab your bag and you button yourself up the best way you can, and then you were taken to another part, and it was like a room, and there were seats, like you were going to a movie, but, maybe about as big as this room. And we were seated there, and then there was a counter, like, running along here. And there was two men behind it with uniforms. And their uniforms were open all the way down, no hats on, and they didn't have any air conditioning in those days either. And we were told to sit. We weren't told what was going to happen, just sit. Of course, there was a lot of people there beside me, and I'm sitting there. And gradually people would come in, and they had to go over to this counter, and these two men, these two officers, or whatever, the guards, whatever they were, asked them questions, and whoever they were meeting, would come, these people would come from behind the counter, and then when you pass and they would, like, recognize and everything, they come from behind the counter and took you, and off you go. Gradually people were leaving and leaving, and I'd look around, and I would say, "Gee, all my aunts . . ." Because they were supposed to meet me. "All of my aunts have forgotten about me. Oh, my God! Nobody's going to take me. Where am I going to go?" I was praying and praying and praying. And gradually there was a lot of people, there was getting to be less people there, and getting there. Finally my name was called, and I got up, and come over to the counter, and a door opened behind the counter at the corner, and these two ladies come from behind. They had white voile dresses on them. You know, in those days they had white, and big hats. My two aunts, Aunt Mame and Aunt Nell. And I recognized them from their pictures. We had photos in our living room of all of them. And oh, I was so excited. I bust out crying. And my aunts, "Come, come, come, come, come, come down." "Do you know these ladies?" And I said, "Yes." "Who are they?" "That's my aunt, my Aunt Margaret and my Aunt Nell." "Well, what are their names?" I said, "Mrs. Cook and Mrs. Budd." That was their names. I was shaking like a leaf. And they said, "Who's your grandmother?" That was, Grandma wasn't there. But he was asking me all these questions, both of them. And I said, "Mrs. Parker, or Mrs. Mullins." And he said, "Well, doesn't she have a name?" And my aunts were still standing there. And I said her name. "What was her maiden name?" "Margaret Powers." I remember her name, Margaret Powers. And they asked me a whole lot of questions before my aunts opened their mouths, they couldn't open their mouths. So I kept looking over at them. And finally they said, "These two ladies come to claim you." And, "How much money have you got?" They asked me how much money did I have. I think I had about five pounds, five pounds in . . .

LEVINE: In dollars?

GORDON: American, I don't know, but I had money, anyhow, because my father said, "You take care of that money, you take care of yourself." And, anyway, uh, my aunts were left, they lifted up the thing, and my aunts came around to me, you know, and they looked at me, and I just, I just looked. I was so relieved, and, still in all, I said, these two people that I have never talked to. And I remember my younger aunt put her arms around me and hugged me, and all the ways, she said, "Let's get out of here." And we had to get out and go back the way we came in, all through this big opening, this great, big room, this light coming in through the windows up in the roof, and all these people talking different languages. And then there was another, another desk where we had to stand, and I was asked more questions. I was asked how much money I had there, and who was these ladies, and these were different men. And I started to bust out crying, and my aunt my embarrassed. She said, "You have to answer these questions. I can't answer them for you." So I had to answer the questions. I think I cried all the way, I don't know, we got on the tender and got back to New York, and we got out there, and I said, well, she said, "Now you're in New York City." And I couldn't stop crying. No matter how many times they told me to stop crying, I couldn't stop crying. I was so, all that relief came out of me. And I was looking around to see if I could see anybody that was on the ship with me, and they had all departed. So finally my aunt said, "We're going to take you to dinner, and you're going to see, in New York." And it was so hot. Oh, it was so hot. They didn't seem to mind it, but I was roasting. She said, "That dress is a little bit too heavy, and we're going to have to take you in and buy you a lighter dress, and then when you get back to Westchester you can get some shopping done." Well, I was exhausted already. And I remember, oh, I looked at the windows, oh, I thought New York was a fairyland. I thought it was such a wonderful place. All the people, and all the cars, and all the different, oh, I didn't know what to look at first. Well, anyway, um, we walked down to go to a restaurant, and I guess it was Broadway, I don't know, I forget what street it was. Oh, no. First of all, ( she laughs ) first of all they took me into Macy's. It was the first, the first department store in the United States that I went into it. I never saw such a big store. And this is funny. When we got in, you had these escalators, you know. And I never saw an escalator before. And my Aunt Mame went on the escalator, and I saw the just go, I saw people going up, going up this big thing, and I said to my aunt, "Oh, no, I can't get on that. I'm scared to death. I don't want to . . ." ( she laughs ) My Aunt Nell was behind me. She said, "Nothing is going to happen to you. Hold onto the railing. That's the way people get up to the next floor. Otherwise you'll have to go up the big, long stairs. We don't do that." Aunt Mame was halfway up, you know? And here I'm supposed to be behind her, and my Aunt Nell is behind me with her hands on my shoulders getting me up. Oh, I wouldn't go up in that thing at all. Finally, no, I didn't go on it. "Well," she said, "we'll have to go up the stairs." I think there was a stairs. I remember I didn't get on it. No, you couldn't get me on that thing for the, oh, they had a hard time with me. So finally Aunt Mame went up, Aunt Nell took me up, and we went all the way up, and she, she said, she said, "You're going to be living in the United States, and you're going to be in stores that have these escalators, and you're going to have to get used to doing these things." She says, "There's a lot of things you're going to have to learn. I had to learn when I got here." She gave me a big history. Well, anyhow, we got up to the next floor, and my aunt was up there waiting for me. We went to the dresses, and we picked out a dress. And I wouldn't wear this, and I couldn't wear that. I had my own way. Finally she picked out a dress, and I remember that dress so well. It was a jersey, a red, it was a jersey. It had different designs on it. It had red on it, and it had a little green on it, and a

couple of other little colors. What got me going was no sleeves. And I said to my aunt, "You want me to walk out with no sleeves on my dress?" And she said, "Oh, Lord." She said, "This is New York, it's roasting here, this is summer, this is June. You can't, people don't, look at the way we're dressed." They had voile dresses on them, you know, they used to wear them starched, and lace petticoats in those days, and longer skirts, you know? They put the dress on me. It looked good because I was very thin. They put the dress on me anyhow. Oh, the sales lady said I looked beautiful, and all the colors . . . Of course, I was listening to all this flattery, you know? And this is what bothered me. Here am I naked. What would my parents say to see me go around naked with this skimpy dress on me? Well, anyhow, they wouldn't give me back my other dress, so I had to wear it. ( Dr. Levine laughs ) The girl put it in the bag, and Aunt Mame said to me, "Now you look nice." And I think I had a nice hat. Or did they, or I got a new hat, too, the same day, oh, and the hat was all right. So then we had to go to the restaurant, and we were walking down, down the street in New York City, on a hot, hot, June day, and we're looking at the windows, and I come by this restaurant, and in the restaurant, big restaurant, and inside the big windows of this restaurant they were making pancakes. I don't know if you ever remember anything they used to make, it was, what was the name of that famous, that famous restaurant?

-- [pp. 17] --

LEVINE: It wasn't Horn & Hardart?

GORDON: I don't know. No, I don't think it, no, I don't think it was . . .

LEVINE: Um, Schraff's?

GORDON: It's Schraff's, I think it was Schraff's. In those days, they made pancakes inside the window. It was to draw people. And I loved pancakes, and my mother used to make pancakes all the time. And I stopped dead and looked in the window. And that wasn't the restaurant they were going to take me. They were going to take me to a big restaurant. And I said to my aunt, to my two aunts, and they were pushing me away from there, "Come on." I said, "Oh, I want pancakes." And she said, "No, you don't want pancakes. That, we'll go to a nice restaurant, we're going to have dinner." I said, "Oh, I want pancakes, please, I want pancakes." Well, we wound up at Schraff's with pancakes anyhow. And I guess they were thinking, "We're going to have trouble with this dame." ( Dr. Levine laughs ) But, uh, I was so overcome with everything, everything was too much at the one time, but I wanted my pancakes, and I got my pancakes.

LEVINE: How would you describe yourself as a twenty-one-year-old?

GORDON: Well, I wasn't, I wasn't forward. In other words, I was mannerly, I was taught manners, good manners, and, uh, you know, and if I didn't, my father said, and my mother, of course, talked to me a lot before I left, and if you didn't understand something, ask, and if they wanted to ask you something, you, this, that and the other, and always be polite, because we were always taught to be polite and everything. And just pay attention to your aunts and your grandmother, and, "Write, write, write, make sure you write home." Of course, I would do that anyhow. So, anyhow, uh, that was the end of that. I didn't go to the big restaurant. I was satisfied with my pancakes. So we finally come back, and we were to meet my cousin, my Aunt Mame's daughter, Margaret, who I only had seen her pictures, you know? And she had a brother, Charles. My Aunt Mame had a daughter, Margaret,

and Charles. And we were to meet her, she worked in New York. She had a big position in New York in a magazine company there. She worked there for years. And we were waiting, we were to wait her in the station where we'd get the train, a big station, uh . . .

-- [pp. 18] --

LEVINE: Grand Central?

GORDON: Grand Central, yeah, Grand Central. In the meantime, my aunt called up the family here where we were coming home, to Mount Vernon, my grandmother and, uh, and my grandmother talked on the phone, and my uncle, my Uncle Dennis, my father's youngest brother, they were all over here in America, and they talked, and somebody got on the phone and said, "Are you sure, are you sure you're from Ireland?" What, they said that I didn't have a big brogue. You know, that I didn't have, sounded like. And it was the first time I ever talked on a phone, because you didn't need phones home. And they were all talking, everybody wanted to get on the phone to talk to me. In the meantime, Aunt Mame got on the phone, she said, "She's very tired, and we're all hot and bothered." And she said, "We're waiting for Margaret, she should be here very soon, and we'll be on our way home." And that was that. We were waiting for Margaret. And here we see this, I heard my Aunt Nell say, "Here comes Margaret." And I looked across the whole length of that station, and I saw this girl, this blonde girl coming from the distance. And I remember she had a violet colored sheath dress. She was a little heavier, buxom, bigger than me, you know? And she was coming down, she was trotting as fast as she could. She spotted us, and my Aunt Mame, who was her mother, said, "This is your cousin Margaret you're meeting." And she was coming, because she was coming home with us. And when she come over she looked at me and she said, "My cousin!" Oh, she wrapped her arms around me and hugged me and kissed me, and I thought she was the most beautiful girl. She was a beautiful girl, a beautiful girl. She just died two years ago here. She was sick for quite a long time. And she was I think two years younger than me, two years younger, yeah, two years younger. But I never, I thought I never saw such as beautiful, I couldn't take me eyes off of her, she was so beautiful. Well, we all got on the train to come back home to Mount Vernon, Westchester County, and all the way up in the train, going through the Bronx and all this, all I could see was, of course, you only saw the back of the apartments, and all lines and lines of clothes hanging out the window, one on top of the other, and I said, "My goodness, how . . ." Looking up, you know saying, and she went, "That's where they have to dry their clothes." "Don't they have any gardens?" "No, they don't have gardens in New York State, in New York City, they don't. This is the Bronx. It's part of New York." They were telling me about it on the way up, all the way up. I couldn't get over all the lines and lines and lines of clothes. And another thing I couldn't get over, everybody's mouth was moving. ( they laugh ) Chewing gum, chewing gum. I, these are funny things to talk about.

-- [pp. 19] --

LEVINE: You never had seen chewing gum?

GORDON: No, we didn't chew gum. You eat candy, and all that stuff, but no chewing gum. And I said to my aunt, "What's the matter? Everybody's mouth had moved." My aunt laughed at that, too." And she said, "Well, there's a lot of things you're going to have to get used to as you get along here." She said, and she said, "You'll understand." She said, "That's chewing gum. People keep that in their mouths. It

helps them think." She was giving me all kinds of, all I was watching, I was fascinated. Everybody's mouth was going. And it took me, I couldn't get over that. When I wrote home and told my father that, he couldn't figure out what I was talking about. But, anyhow, there were some, certain things that, you know, I had never seen. Well, anyhow, we finally get to Mount Vernon. The train comes into Mount Vernon. And my aunt, they had a big apartment, a very large apartment on Prospect Avenue, which ran in front of the station house. There was a big station house in Mount Vernon. And she said to me, "Look at the family, they're all out on the back stoop." Now, I didn't know what a stoop was. A stoop to me was a patio, like, you know? And I saw all these people waving like mad. I didn't know their apartment was, you know, down from the station. It was down a half a block. But they could see us getting out of the train. So when we were walking down, everybody was shaking their hands and shaking their hands, and they were in the back part of the apartment, and, of course, when we got up, it was a beautiful street. It was lovely, you know, and trees, all the trees, and they were shining. And when we got around we rang the bell downstairs, and they let us in downstairs, upstairs. Everybody was crowding out into the hall to grab ahold of me. And I'm looking at all these, who are all these people. And then I saw this little fat lady with her glasses on the end of her nose, tears running down her cheeks, you know, and behind her there was another lady, a little taller than her, thin, and tears were running down her cheeks, and that was my grandmother, and my, hear sister, my grandaunt. And she said, "Oh, this is Billie's daughter, oh, Billie's . . ." ( she is moved ) And I was so frustrated I didn't know who to look at first, and everybody was putting their arms around me and hugging me and kissing me and pulling me, and then talking to me, "How was the trip," and everything. I couldn't answer everybody at one time. I was exhausted. And finally, they took me into the dining room, now, there's this big table all laid out with this big white, and she said, "And this is an Irish linen tablecloth." And my grandmother was sitting me down and, oh, she could talk and talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. That was my entrance into the United States of America. And . . .

-- [pp. 20] --

LEVINE: And how did you feel that first night?

GORDON: Well, I was very, very, I was, I was glad I was there, and I was happy to see my relations, and everybody was so kind, and they couldn't do enough for me, you know? And I just couldn't get it through my head I'm not home, I'm in America, with all that boat and the ship and Ellis Island and everything. And, of course, I was tired from answering questions. And then, of course, when my cousin Charlie came home, that was my Aunt Mame's son, he was handsome. He had curly hair, tall. And he just looked at me, and when I looked at him, he reminded me a bit of my father. There's something about him reminded me a bit, I said, the first thing, I said, "You look just like my dad." And he said, "I do?" And he was looking at me. He said, "She hasn't got much of a brogue." And I had a brogue, of course. And I was a little insulted that I didn't have a brogue. And we had a wonderful time, and my, my, uh, aunts' husbands and their families and, oh, it was wonderful. And I had a wonderful, it was wonderful. And I sat down two days later and wrote a big, long letter home to my family and told them that it was beautiful here, and my grandmother, she said she'd probably never see my father, and why he didn't come over, and I told her once again, and although all the things, they knew over here all the stuff that was going on over there, because it was in the papers and everything, you know? And they had so many questions through, through their, we gradually getting used, I stayed, I stayed a month without, before I went to work. And they got me a job as a

nurse girl in Pelham Manor, which was a high class, Pelham Manor, New York. You know, you've heard of Pelham Manor.

-- [pp. 21] --

LEVINE: Is it, um, is it a, um, a nursing home?

GORDON: No, no, no. No, see, a private family. They're all mansions up there. Pelham Manor is in, off Westchester County. That was my first job as nurse girl. The family had a boy and a girl. Edmund was the boy, and Jean was the girl. I remember. And, uh, I went from that job to, and then I used to come down, trolleys were running in those days. We didn't have buses. You had the trolleys, and in the summertime they had the open sides, the open sides trolleys. You got into the sides, and the trolley was open, you know? And, uh, I liked trolleys. Trolleys were nice. I liked them better than the buses. Of course, they were a little slow, but they were always, you were always able to catch it. They were always there, you know? And, uh . . .

LEVINE: Had you worked in Ireland before you came?

GORDON: I just, I just had a job, yes. I worked in a bakery. They had a big, Sheehan's was the name of the family. They had eleven children, one girl and ten boys. But, uh, I waited on table there, and they owned the bakery. They had a big bakery, and they had a bakery shop. And their rooms, their apartment was three stories up over the shop. That's where the family lived. And I started in there as kind of a nurse girl to the younger children, you know, see that they got to bed, and that they got their baths, and got fed. They didn't sit at the big table in the dining room with the family when it was evening. They went in and were put to bed early. And I also waited on table there. And there also, across the bridge there was, as I told you, the black water river divided our town, and you had to go over the bridge, and the bridge, they had a bakery there for all kinds of pastries, special pastries they made. And, uh, Irish wedding cakes. And I remember at the top, up at the nursery rooms, the top of the house, where the nursery and the bedrooms were, there was a landing there, and they had this great, big cupboard, the family had a great, big cupboard on the top, built into the wall, and all kinds of cakes. Irish wedding cakes are not like the cakes you have in weddings here.

-- [pp. 22] --

LEVINE: What's it like?

GORDON: They're like fruit cakes, they're all kinds of fruit in there, and they're lambasted with rum or whiskey, and every so often Mr. Sheehan, the boss, used to go up there, and they were in cans, special cans, and different sizes, and different prices, and different mixtures of cakes and, for weddings. And they were soaked with different liquors, brandies and whiskeys and all this, and they were put back in there again. And these were all Irish wedding cakes. When my son Jackie got married, John, Jackie got married, he married a very, still married, a Swedish descent girl, her grandmother was Swedish, and very nice people. And they went to school together, and they eventually got married. And, um, they had an Irish, we had an Irish wedding cake for the wedding. Everybody got a piece. Now, when my brother, when my, I have a stepbrother. My father, my mother died when I was only two years out here. My mother died, and I never got over it. I cried, I cried for years. And just the thought of not seeing my mother again never went out of my head. I, she died, I

don't know whether, she had died of cancer. So my mother must have been not well, and didn't let me know. And, you know, kids don't pay attention to these things too much, because she was always a very active woman, and, uh, you know, was always in good spirits and everything. But she got sick, and I always wondered if she worried about me after I left home. Maybe she missed me so much out of everything together at the one time, I don't know. But my father wrote and told me. It took a long time to get any letters. In those days there was no airplanes, and it took so long for ships to get in, by the time you got it, my mother was dead and buried. And I was working, at that particular time I was working in New Rochelle with another family, uh, I was waitress in that house. There was no children there. I was a waitress there. I was a big, and Mr. Laird, who was the head of the house, he was, uh, in business with the Canadian company called Laird Shoer Shoes, made these shoes, and there were these leather shoes that come out in those days. I remember he brought me a pair, the first one, one of the first pair, my boss kind of liked me, I guess. He was an elderly man, white hair, a very nice man. And he bought me one. And I remember when I walked they used to squeak, the leather. They were beautiful shoes. Oh, I was so excited. And we had the cook who was from the north of Ireland, a wonderful cook. And we had a young girl there who was supposed to take care of, well, she was supposed to be the nurse girl for Mr. Laird's daughter, because this was his second wife, and this was the daughter by his first wife, and she had a little girl called, a little boy called Laddie, and we all loved that little boy. But my boss was a very fine man. But, uh, that was when I was working. I was working there for, oh, a couple of years, and then I met my husband.

-- [pp. 23] --

LEVINE: And how did you meet him?

GORDON: I met him through, uh, his sister. His sister was married to my father's youngest brother, Dennis. And I used to go down and visit there. And, uh, one night he took me home to New Rochelle. It was getting late, and I had dinner at my uncle's house with his wife. And he took me home, and I didn't want him to take me home because I had met him, but just met him, you know, and my uncle introduced me to him. So he never bothered with me, and I never bothered with him. So, anyhow, he was, I was going home that evening, and my uncle said to him, "Oh, here comes Bill, let him take you home. He'll walk you to the station." I said, "Oh, no, he doesn't have to do that. I know my way home." I was in Mount Vernon then. I had to get the train to get to New Rochelle. So he got me by the arm and took me down to the station, which was two blocks down from where they live. And we're sitting in the station downstairs, waiting for the train to come in, and I didn't have nothing to say because I never had a conversation with him, and being he was a Yankee, and I, uh, I said to him, "You don't have to take me home, you know." I said, "I know how to get home." He says, "That's all right, I'll take you right home to the door. I've got nothing else to do, so." He got on the train with me and walked, because you had to walk through a little, uh, park to get to the, to the big houses. And he took me all the way to my park, and he said, we would, we got to talking. Of course, my uncle was his brother-in-law. And, uh, he said, "Well, what do you do when you get on your days off?" I thought it was none of his business what I done on my days off. And I said, "Why?" I said, "I go to church and come home, and we . . ." Because we got, (?) got Thursday, we got Thursday off, and every other Sunday. Those were the days you got off. So I told him that I get off, I told him the days I got off. He said, "Would you like to go to a movie with me sometime?" I said, "Oh, I don't know." I said to him, I didn't really want to go with him. I said, "I don't think

so. I go out with my girlfriends." Sometimes I went to movies with the cook. And he said, "I'll tell you, I'll come and get you." Just like that, "I'll come and get you." Didn't ask me whether I wanted to go, you know, or not. And I said to him, "Oh, all right."

-- [pp. 24] --

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO

GORDON: But I didn't hear from him for a couple of days, and then the phone rings up there, and, uh, the cook answered the phone, and she said, "Somebody wants to talk to you." She called me Maizie, too, because that was a family, my family called me. And I said, "Who is it?" Because nobody ever called me on the phone. And she said, "There's a man on there, you'd better go and answer it." So I answered it, I thought it might be my uncle. It was Bill. He said, uh, "You're off this Sunday," because he remembered. I didn't know what to say. I'm stuttering on the phone. I said, "I don't know. Why?" He said, "I'm going to take you to New York. I want to take you to a show in New York." I said, "He's got a nerve. I don't even know . . ." And the cook came in behind me. She said, "Who is it?" And I said, so she said, "Don't say anything to him." She said, "You don't know what, who he is." Because she didn't know that he was married, his sister was married to my. So, anyhow, he made the date, whether I liked it or not, he was going to come up. And I was, I didn't know what the heck to do. And I told the cook, she said, "You'd better watch those guys." You know, she was in America a long, long time. And she said, she didn't want me to go out with him, and she says, "Do you know, do you know your uncle knows (?)" I said, "Yeah, I guess he does." Well, he was up right on the, and I remember straw hats, tilted on the one side, and he's coming around, coming around the back. And I was sitting in the kitchen, and it was in the summertime, too, and he said, "Well, come on, let's go." Like that. "Come on, let's go." No boys ever talked to me that way. ( they laugh ) So, uh, off we went anyhow, and I kept looking at him, and I kept, is this for real, you know? We went to New York and, what was the picture we saw? I remember the picture. I don't know, I know I cried at the picture, and he couldn't get over me crying at the picture. Oh, I think it was then, I forget now whether it was the Death of a Salesman, I think, because I remember I cried at the picture. I was always crying at pictures anyhow. So, anyhow, we had a great time, he took me to a restaurant, and he brought me home, and I thought that was the end of that. So he said, "Goodnight, you had a good time?" And I had a good time, and I thanked him very much, and that was that. So, uh, the cook, her room was next to mine, and she could come through. We had a door separating mine. The bathroom was in between, so she come in, she couldn't wait to hear what was going on. So I told her. "Oh," she said, "well," she said, "I didn't know he was a relation to you." I said, "He's not no relation to me. His sister is married to my uncle." "Well," she said, "be cautious anyhow." She said, "You know, you're only new here, and be cautious." But, boy, he called me up, another, the following week he called me up, on a Thursday. And I had my half day off, and I was going to the beauty parlor to get my hair curled. And, uh, I told him I had to go, I had an appointment. He said, "Well, I'll wait for you." He said, "Meet me at the station." But we didn't go to New York. He took me to Procter's. And in those days they had vaudeville, which was very funny. You had a movie, and you had a vaudeville, and vaudeville was wonderful. There was all kind of things, doing crazy things, you know, comics, and dancing, and singing and everything, and it was, vaudeville was wonderful. It was Procter's Theater. And from then on we got to be, got courting one

another. But my aunt didn't want me to keep company, steady company. They wanted me to be here a little longer and, uh, you know, earn more money, because I used to send part of my salary home and everything. And then my aunt was a little bit put out about me keeping company, even though my uncle was married to his, she wanted me to get around more and to meet more. But I kind of fell for Will and he fell for me, and that was the end of that. We got married in 1929, right in the middle of the Depression. He had just a job a few days a week, like everybody else had, but I kept my job, and, uh, I stayed on my job because I was making, at that time it was good money. You, the salary was, what, thirty-five dollars a month, but you got, you were living in, and you had, you know, you had no expenses otherwise. So we didn't take an apartment or anything because he was trying to get work, and I had the job and I stayed on the job and, until I got pregnant, which was a couple of years later, and I had to quit. And by that time, my husband was a painter, that was, he was painter, and the he had his own business eventually, painter, decorator. He was a very good painter, and very well-liked. He was a nice man, my husband, and a very decent person. And, uh, he was strict, in a way, too.

-- [pp. 25] --

LEVINE: Did he, uh, come from Ireland, or was he born here?

GORDON: No. His mother was Irish. His mother, his father was from the North of Ireland, and his mother worked for Judge Mills. His mother had a sister over here, and they both worked for Judge Mills in Mount Vernon, part of Mount Vernon, he had a big home there. And her husband-to-be, at that time she didn't know, he was one of the chauffeurs, they had cars in those days, you know, uh, horses and cars. They didn't have many cars in those days, and he was the groom or whatever, what was it. And that's how she met her husband there. But he was a real Protestant, you know, his family were all North of Ireland Protestants, part Scotch, he was Scotch. And, uh, that's the factions that fight back and forth. But he always spoke, I didn't meet him. He died about three years before I come to this country, and I didn't meet him. And, uh, he, uh, he always mentioned about, uh, the North of Ireland, how hard it was on the Catholics there, that they were so looked down on. And, of course, everybody knew by that time, then. But he, and him and my mother-in-law and, uh, him got together, and courted, and they got married, and there was a big to-do with his family being her married a Catholic, a Roman Catholic. And, uh, he didn't care. And, they just didn't bother with him after that. The only time, some of the family was over here, and they run a butcher store in Mount Vernon, and the only time they ever got near the family was when there was a wake, somebody had died and they had to come pay their respects and that was it. But, uh, they didn't want to have nothing to do with him. And eventually he wanted to turn Catholic but my, my, uh, mother-in-law was against it. She said no, I don't want you to change your religion for me. She said, "You can keep your religion, I keep mine. And," she said, "whatever the children want to be when they grow up, that's their business." And, uh, she said, "I don't want you doing it because you married me. Do it because you want to become a Catholic, and I want you to be a good one." But, she said, "Otherwise don't do it." She wasn't for that. But he did become a Catholic before he died, and his family never acknowledged him after that. The ones in, in, uh, in the North of Ireland. That was kind of sad, you know? My mother-in-law was a good woman, a good religious woman. She had five kids. She had, uh, one daughter and four sons, one of them, my husband was the second in the family. And, all, of course, we had a very hard time during the Depression. Everybody did. There was no work. There was no welfare in those days where you could get help when you

needed it. And people had to do the best they can, and I remember my husband traveling to New York to just get a job maybe for two days, and, uh, of course, when I got pregnant we had to get an apartment. We got an apartment up the street from my mother-in-law. It was a three-family house, and it was empty. It had something to do with, had been in an estate for some years. So my husband, we took the first floor, and my son, Bill, was born. And, uh . . .

-- [pp. 26] --

LEVINE: This was in Mount Vernon?

GORDON: In Mount Vernon, yeah.

LEVINE: And that's where my three sons were born in Mount Vernon Hospital. And they, when they grew up, of course, they joined the Marines, in World War Two. Bill was the first one, and my, uh, Jackie was the second one. He quit school to join. He was, he looked older than my older son, and he wanted to go in the Marines in the worst way. And we fought it, and we fought it. Every morning he wanted me, his father to sign the, but he couldn't. He wouldn't do it. That went on, and we went to the school, to the, uh, what do you call the boss of the school?

LEVINE: The superintendent?

GORDON: The superintendent. And we told him that, he said, "Mrs. Gordon," and my husband wouldn't talk to him. He said, "You might as well let him join because," he said, "he's not paying attention to his studies." And, uh, he wouldn't eat his breakfast in the morning going to school, because he wanted to sign. And it went on and went on. And in the meantime I had a job as a salesgirl on Fourth Avenue. I worked there for quite a number of years. And this was getting me down. Finally my husband went to work one morning, and my son didn't, I said to him, "I'm not going to sign no papers." Finally he said, "Well, I'm going to join anyway." And he was only seventeen years old, and I said, "You can't join till you're eighteen." He had changed, he had, he still has his, whatever he done, he changed, he looked eighteen because he was big and tall and, you know, he looked eighteen. Well, that morning, I turned back into the kitchen, where he was sitting at the kitchen table, and I said, the paper was always on the table for him. He always had that paper. I signed my name to it. Now, my husband didn't know this. He was already gone to work, and I had this to think about. He was in, oh, he was so excited and so, he ran down the stairs across the street to tell the lady across the street to tell her son that he was going to go in the service, and that my mother signed the paper. And my husband come home that night, oh, was murder in the house. I shouldn't have signed that paper. It's the last thing I should have done. He was too young to go into the service. Oh, I don't think my husband ever forgave me for that. He took, when he had to go to take him to New York where he was going on, was it Dr. Jevé, he was going down South to, uh . . .

-- [pp. 27] --

LEVINE: Fort Dix is New Jersey.

GORDON: Fort, no, it wasn't Fort Dix. It wasn't, was it, is there a June, a (?) June?

LEVINE: I don't know, I don't know.

GORDON: I forget. It's out of my head. If I had time to think about it, I would remember maybe. But he, my husband, went with him when he was going down to the train. And my husband finally said, "Well, Jack, it's a good thing you only took up for two years." He said, "No, Dad, I took up for three years." Well, that was three times worse. And he took him down, and when he come home my husband didn't talk to me, I think, for a week.

LEVINE: How did you feel about your sons going into the service when you had experienced your father . . .

GORDON: Well, I'll tell you, they were all joining up at that time and my sons were no different than any, Jimmy, my youngest one. He got after me. I had him, and I said, "I'm not signing no papers for you either!" I didn't, either. He waited till he was, but then the war was practically coming, not actually coming to an end, but a little slowing up. He was sent to Okinawa. He was in Okinawa after the, after the, uh, after the war was over, it took him a while to come back, and he was always on the stocky side, Jim. He always had to watch his, he always blames it on me, because I put weight on before he was born. He said, "Mom, I got all your, your, uh . . ." ( she laughs ) Well, anyway, he used to say that's why I like to eat, you like to eat all the, because when he came home and he came up the stairs, he looked so thin and his face looked so small. I said, "What in the world did they do to you?" I said, he said, "Mom, I feel fine, don't start crying, don't do this, don't do that." Well, Jackie didn't go overseas because he had an accident. Him and his friends were coming home when they were stationed? Where were they stationed now? Out, they were, he was . . . Where was he stationed in? He was in, he was still here in the United States. They were coming home from being on the town and somebody hit their car, and Jackie's leg, he was in the back of the car, and he was asleep, he said, and they were in civilian clothes, they were out for the evening, you know? And he had a plate put in his ankle. He was sent to Paris Island here, not Paris Island, uh, here in, uh, the hospital here in, oh, what's the name of it? I can't remember the names of some of these.

-- [pp. 28] --

LEVINE: That's all right.

GORDON: He was sent up from the camp where he was stationed, up here to the, and we got notification that he was hurt. And, of course, my husband and I went out there, and he had a thing from here down to here, plaster cast. And he hit his head. So he didn't, he wasn't sent overseas. As I said, it was beginning to slow up. But Bill was in the first war. He was sent back, and he always wanted to be a reporter. Ever, he was a little boy and he always wanted to be a reporter. And he went to college, Marietta College, and studied for journalism. And when he came home, of course, he, uh, was a newspaper man. Then he went back to the Vietnam War. He was out there, uh, from Jersey, from the paper that he worked for then, before the Star Ledger, he was sent out there, and I had to worry about that, because it was a war all over again. And he used to send columns into the paper about the different boys that came from Jersey, and he used to write pieces about them in his paper, that their parents in Jersey would know about them. And he always, he loves newspaper. He said he wouldn't, he's been a newspaper man for a long time. He said, "I'm going to stay as long as I can in newspaper." He loves it, he loves it. Very few people love their jobs. But, anyway, he's a good reporter, and he takes a big interest in it.

LEVINE: He is a good reporter. I've read his stuff.

GORDON: I'm proud of all my boys, they were all good, and they were all good. All my grandchildren were fine. They were no angels, but they never got into any trouble. Sometimes I forget their names, my grandchildren and great-grandchildren. I have to stop and think who was, what's your name next, you know? And they get a big kick out of me. They say, "Oh, Grandma. You were only fooling." You know, that sort of thing. But, uh . . .

-- [pp. 29] --

LEVINE: Well, just to get back a little bit to the immigration part, do you think having immigrated to this country made a difference in the kind of person you became?

GORDON: Yes. Yes, yes.

LEVINE: What do you think it did as far as the influence on you?

GORDON: I learned a lot and, uh, the work, the way, your working hours, the wages you got and the people you met. And I'll tell you one thing, though. It took me a long time to get used to the different slang and the different things people used to say. And, uh, you know, one time I happened to, in my, we were in my aunt's house, and I had been working at the time, and she said to me, now, oh, I was going to a party. Where was it, I was going to a party with one of the girls that worked with me those days, and she said, my aunt said, "Well, make sure," she says, "you don't miss mass in the morning." Because it was on a Saturday night. "Oh," I said, "she's going to knock me up." And my, everybody stopped dead. ( she laughs ) "She's going to knock me up." That's what they say on the other side, you know, knock me up . . .

LEVINE: Is wake you up.

GORDON: In the morning. And that's so different here. Of course, I was as innocent as a babe. Another time I went to dinner to some friends of my aunt's in New York, and, uh, we got to talking at the table. She said, "I never know whether to take you anywhere." We got talking about different things. And when one of the girls got up from, the daughters, I guess it was, got up from the table in the kitchen, and said, "Oh," I said, "she's so homely, I like her, she's so homely." And homely meant ugly here, and homely meant beautiful or friendly. So I had all these things to conquer. I never know when I opened my mouth that I was going to say something that sounded different over here. Because you did, you know? You spoke different things, and different things stood for different things over there, and when you were over here, it was entirely different. And I said one day to my grandmother, "I'm not going to open my mouth any more when we go visit." She said, "Why, dear?" "Because," I said, "every time I say something it's the wrong thing." She said, "Well, that's how you're going to learn. That's how we all learned when we come to this country. You're going to have a lot of patience, and you're going to have to listen and learn all these things." And she used to say, "Don't get upset. People understand, you know, that people are immigrating over here." But I was always watching my mouth that I'd say the right thing. And there was several things that I, oh, another thing I done, when my aunt, I wanted to vacuum clean her living room one time, and we'd, of course, you don't, you took your things out over there and put them across the line in Ireland and you beat them. Very few people at that time had vacuum cleaners over here either. And my aunt had a vacuum cleaner. And I wanted to do, this is before I went to work when I was only here about three weeks. I wanted to do something around the house, you know. My aunt used to go to work. And, uh, I said,

my grandmother was out visiting somebody, over visiting her sister in Yonkers. And I thought, oh, I wanted, I took the vacuum cleaner out of the closet. And I had never used it. And I was, I know why she put it in the wall someplace. So I put it in the wall, I couldn't get it in there. I don't know how, it didn't fit, or I wasn't doing the right thing. I don't know. But I was going to do that vacuuming. So I went out and got a knife. Oh, this is the truth. Oh, the things I done! And I stuck it in, oh, the thing flew in my hand, and it bend the thing of the knife, and I flew halfway across the room. I said, "What the heck kind of a thing is this?" See, we didn't have electricity in Ireland at that time. They have electricity all over there now, some time after that. So there was things I had to learn. Well, I didn't, I put that vacuum cleaner back in quick in the closet, and when my aunt come home, I said to my aunt, uh, "I tried to use the vacuum cleaner." She said, "You did? You don't have to do that. You know, all this kind of thing. And we were sitting at the table, my cousin, with my cousin Margaret, and her brother was there. And she said, well, she said, I said, "I couldn't get the thing in the wall." And she said to me, "What thing in the wall?" So she goes in and takes the vacuum cleaner out of the closet, and the cord wasn't wrapped around, I think, the way it was, you know, wrapped. It was loose, loose. I got scared and threw it in the closet. And she called Charlie, her son. She said, "Come here and look at." What was she talking about? So I told her about the knife. Oh, they almost died. Oh, "Keep away from the electricity, don't go near the lamps, keep away, don't touch anything." Because I hadn't, I had nothing to do with electricity in the old country. At that time there was no electricity in parts of Ireland. My part, too. There was no, you had lamps all around the place, oil lamps. And I said, and I got, I thought they got angry at me, and my grandmother was scared to death. She said to me, my aunt said, and my grandmother, "Where were you?" She said, "Well, I was over visiting Maryann." That was her sister in Yonkers. And I thought I was doing something good to help out, you know? Well, I got warning. Ever since, electricity, it took me a long time to put a plug in, even when I was married. But there was all these silly things that we didn't know about, and that we had to get to learn, and the things, our way of talking was entirely different. When I used to go visiting with my cousin to her friends, of course, we used to go to the beach, she used to take me to the beach, we used to all go to the beach, and they used to love to listen to me talk. And I used to get very upset, why they want to hear me talk, and why, but they wanted to hear me talk. And, you know, they were nice. But, uh, it used to hurt my feelings. And I said, "Gee, I never go anywhere." And they all was, they all wanted to meet Margaret's cousin from Ireland, because there was only immigrations that was coming over then at that time, you know, and it's not like now. Of course, they're coming without having to go to Ellis Island. And, uh, there was a lot of things that I had to learn, a whole lot of, oh, a different way of life.

-- [pp. 30] --

LEVINE: Was there a time when you felt at home here and that you knew you were going to stay, do you remember when that happened?

GORDON: Well, after my mother died, and then some years after my father wrote and told, oh, my sister wrote and told me my father was getting married. That shook me up a little. And, uh, well, I thought after all my dad is the only one in the family, this family, these families that's over there, and, uh, after all, he's getting old, and my sister didn't like the idea, and neither did my brother. Uh, he immigrated to England, and my sister, he sent for my sister, who couldn't get along with my stepmother, who was very bossy, didn't want any of the children living in the house,

and my younger sister got married and moved out of the house, and then he had a son by my second stepmother. But my father, we wrote regularly and everything. And I didn't hold it against my father. As I wrote and told my sisters, "Well, he's alone, he's the last of his family over there, and he has a right to have somebody to take care of him. Now, what happens when you people get married? You'll have your own homes, and my dad will be alone?" You know? And they couldn't see it that way. And she was a little bossy anyhow, and she didn't want any of the family in the house. So when she had a boy, Thomas, who's my stepbrother now, who's a wonderful young man, wonderful, and he got married late in life to a girl he went to school with, and she died with cancer, and he's alone again. So he lives alone, and my younger sister who's left now, because we, my sister, my second younger sister died in November on Thanksgiving Day. She had full nursing, she died of cancer, and she had to give up her place, her house and everything, because she couldn't take care of herself. And my younger sister lived at the other side of town in her house, and it was kind of hard for her to take care of my sister. And they had to put her in a nursing home. The doctor told Kathleen she would have to stay in a nursing home to be taken care of. And she died last September, November.

-- [pp. 31] --

LEVINE: Now, when you, you started to say about when you felt comfortable here after you heard that your father died, and that you decided that you . . .

GORDON: My mother died.

LEVINE: I mean, your mother died, and your father remarried.

GORDON: Then my father, some years after, maybe four or five years, or something like that, after, when he got married. Then I kind of, well, of course, I never forgot my mother's, my mother's dead. I felt it worse than when my dad died. My dad died suddenly, a heart attack. He was 77. My mother was only, she wasn't quite 60 yet when she died. And, uh, of course, that was the biggest thing. Everybody's mother would die but my mother wasn't going to die. I was going to see my mother again sometime. But I never could get that feeling out of my system. It was always there that I was never going to see her again. And, uh, that was one of my biggest, biggest drawbacks, a terrible thing. But, uh, as I said, I didn't hold it against my father, but my, the rest of my family did. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: Did anybody else come over from your family?

GORDON: Yes. Oh, I brought two of my brothers. Oh, I forgot about that. I sent for my brother Bill, uh, before I got, just before I got married, I sent for my brother Bill. And he, then, in a year or two, I, my brother and I got together and sent for my other brother, Dennis, so I had both my brothers, they're dead now, but they both got married. One didn't have any children. My brother Bill didn't have any children, and he was in the service, too, for this country. My brother Dennis had six children. And, of course, by that time, he had four or five children. He couldn't go into the service. He had his children to take care of. So, uh, he was, uh, my brother Bill worked in New Rochelle in the office of a storage, a big storage company there, the moving, moving company. He worked there for many, many years until he retired. And, uh, my brother Dennis, he was a, worked on, what do you call them, you see, some of these things, I can't remember the names. He done work out on estates, on their gardens. He was a . . .

-- [pp. 32] --

LEVINE: Landscaping.

GORDON: A landscaper, yeah. He was a landscaper. He loved working outside. He loved flowers, and he loved all that. He died of a heart attack. So did my brother, Bill. That was in the family.

LEVINE: The heart attack.

GORDON: The heart attack.

LEVINE: Okay. We just have about a minute-and-a-half left on this tape, so I wanted to ask you.

GORDON: That's all right, don't worry, don't worry about that.

LEVINE: I wanted to ask you if there's anything else about your immigrating here, anything else that you can think of about how you feel about it, anything more.

GORDON: Oh, no, I got to love it here. I loved it here. And I love the way, the way you lived here, and I loved everything about it here. And since, when I got over, when I talked I got to be more Americanized, you know? Oh, I became a senior citizen, not a senior, I became a citizen.

LEVINE: An American citizen.

GORDON: Yeah. You have to be five years before you, you see, when my mother-in-law came over here, uh, her, her husband, wait now a minute. She said two years, just before, two years before I came over here, if I married an American citizen, I'd automatically, if I had married my husband, I would have automatically become an American citizen. But at that time the law had been changed. You had to be five years here in this country to take out your American citizenship.

-- [pp. 33] --

LEVINE: And then did you go to classes and . . .

GORDON: Yeah, well, we studied it. We had to study. And, uh, we had to go, oh, I remember we had to go all the way down, way, the lowest part of New York, to be examined, you know, and all this sort of thing. And then you were notified that, to go to get your citizenship papers. And I remember we had to go to the Polo Grounds. It was in the open, and my husband couldn't get off because he had to do some work that was important. And my younger son, Jim, Jim came with me. And he was with me when I became a citizen. There was a whole lot of people at that same time became American citizens on the Polo Grounds.

LEVINE: That's great. Now, we've got about a half a minute. How do you feel, how do you think about your Irish side and your American side?

GORDON: I never forgot Fermough, I never forgot Ireland. I'm always interested in what went on over there. And for a long time my father used to send me the papers, the Examiners, and I got all the news of what was going on there. Of course, things were easying out, things were getting a little better, and so on and so on, and everything. And my family was all grown up, and we corresponded all the time, and I

never stopped writing all the time. And I still do write. And, uh, things, I was, I never forgot, I'm still interested in what goes on over there. But I was also an American citizen, and that meant a whole lot to me, to be an American citizen. And all my children were American citizens, and they fought for America, and that made me very proud. And my father, when I wrote home I told my father, of course being a military man, that was up his alley. I told him his three grandsons were in the marines, and he said that was a classy outfit. ( they laugh ) And that, uh, my sons would do well. Just pay attention, and mind yourself, as my father used to say, mind yourself, mind yourself and be a good soldier. That's all that's asked of you. And he wrote and told them that. And he was very proud to know, that he had three grandsons in the marines, the American marines.

-- [pp. 34] --

LEVINE: So that's wonderful, and I think that's a good place to end.

GORDON: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: I want to thank you so much for a most wonderful interview full of lovely . . .

GORDON: I hope it was interesting. To me . . .

LEVINE: . . . remembrances and details, and . . .

GORDON: Oh, you're such a wonderful person to talk to, and you're so pretty. You're so attractive. She's very attractive. ( Dr. Levine laughs ) And very nice, very nice.

LEVINE: Well, I appreciate it.

GORDON: I didn't know just who I was going to meet, and you didn't know who you were going to meet either, you know? I could have been a crotchety old lady.

LEVINE: Well, you're not, and let me just say that I'm speaking to Mary Gordon here in Bridgeport, Connecticut, on April 24th, and this is Janet Levine signing off.

---

Send mail to [ASittner@AlexanderStreet.com](mailto:ASittner@AlexanderStreet.com) with questions or comments about this web site.

Copyright © 2005 [Alexander Street Press, L.L.C.](#)

All rights reserved.

[Terms of use.](#)