**Elisa:** Good morning. This is Elisa Mattson for the National Park Service. Today is September 16th, 1994 and I’m in the home of Mr. John Will, who came from Scotland in 1924 when he was seven years old. Mr. Will, can you start out by telling me your full name and date of birth?

**John:** John Will; January 20th 1917.

**Elisa:** Can you tell me where you came from? Can you tell me the size of your town and describe it for me?

**John:** I came from the town of Cupar Fife, Scotland; approximately 5,000.

**Elisa:** What did it look like?

**John:** It’s a small farming community that was seven miles from the world-famous St. Andrews Golf Course.

**Elisa:** What was the industry for the town?

**John:** Farming.

**Elisa:** What would they farm?

**John:** Wheat mostly.

**Elisa:** What was your father’s name?

**John:** Alexander.

**Elisa:** What did he do for a living?

**John:** He had his own business in town which was coach building business. In those days it was primarily making wagons for the farmers and repairing wagons equipment. He just had started into the early phases of automobile sales.

**Elisa:** Can you describe for me his personality? His temperament?

**John:** Very quiet, a non-assuming type of guy, very nice, very kind, participated in community affairs to a degree.

**Elisa:** What did he look like?

**John:** He was much shorter than me; 5’8 and a half, of slight build, a little moustache.

**Elisa:** Is there any story that you associate with your father from your childhood that you can remember?

**John:** Yes. We were five kids. He ran his own business. He had a shop and he had an office up in the front. On Saturday that was pay day for the kids. Each one of us would track down there to the shop and he would open the safe and [unclear 00:02:41] us out our weekly allowance.

I also remember relationship with my dad. His shop was on a kitty- corner across from the War Memorial that was erected there. Queen Mary came to dedicate the War Memorial and we stood on the roof of his shop and looked down and watched the ceremonies.

**Elisa:** Your mother’s name?

**John:** Jane.

**Elisa:** Did she have a job outside the house?

**John:** No.

**Elisa:** What did she look like?

**John:** Short, chubby, rather plain.

**Elisa:** What was her personality?

**John:** She was a warm, friendly type too. She took real good care of all the kids, was always concerned about the youngsters’ well-being and particularly she was heavy on the educational bit; wanted to get the kids education which I’ll get into later when we describe coming here.

**Elisa:** Is there a story you remember growing up in Scotland, that you associate with your mother?

**John:** I was ill. I got tape worm from eating the ice off the top of a cows’ drinking fountain field next to us. She had to take me to the hospital. Our little town didn’t have a hospital so that involved getting on the train and going to Edinburgh to the hospital there. I remember that quite specifically because it was a new experience being in hospital for her.

**Elisa:** What was the hospital like? Do you remember the doctors?

**John:** It was just like any American hospital; had wards and there were several beds in the ward I was in. I was only there about [inaudible 00:05:16].

**Elisa:** Do you remember the doctor?

**John:** No I don’t.

**Elisa:** Your brothers and sisters, can you tell me their names?

**John:** Yes. The oldest one would be Mary, my sister. She went to the London School of Nursing. She’s a registered nurse. The next one would be Agnes. When we first came here, in Britain practically everybody learns French. My sister Agnes was quite fluent in French so when we first arrived here she taught French in a private school for a while and then went to work in an insurance office.

The next one would be my brother Alexander. He was a mechanical engineer and he worked for big steel companies; Consolidated Steel and then later US Steel, which merged. He was eventually a big type of engineer. He supervised 200 engineers for the US Steel Company few years before he retired. He was an expert on mechanical stuff. During World War Two, they shipped him to the Naval Gun Factory in Washington D.C where he worked with a team on the mechanisms for the dual purpose five inch guns that were to be mounted on the new destroyers.

The next one above me his name is David. He worked in legal work all of his life for the ARCO Oil Company here. It used to be Richfield. He was not actually an attorney but he was pretty close.

**Elisa:** You were the youngest?

**John:** I was the youngest.

**Elisa:** When you were in Scotland can you tell me if you had a garden? Did you have a garden?

**John:** Yes we did. We had a rather expansive garden in the backyard. My dad raised vegetables and then way in the back he had chickens. He raised chickens there. By the way, an interesting story about my home, which I can later show you a picture of it, is we went back on a visit and I remembered everything about my little town that I thought I would.

I remembered about my home, what it looked like. Of course I had a picture of it but the interesting story was that our front yard, you had a house and then you had little lawn and then down by the sidewalk there was a wall; a little stone wall made out of sand stone about three feet high. It had iron work along on top of it. I always remember the story and my mother telling me that one.

When I was born in that house the snow was up to the top of the pilings. When we went on a visit, lo and behold the wall’s there but no pilings. I could see where the stub is open for they had been in the stone. People were not home, that lived in my old home, but the man next door came out and talked to me. I enquired. I said, “What happened to the pilings?” The answer was that they were cut off, melted down and shredded to Germans. In other words they were so short of metals during World War Two that they cut out stuff like that and used it in the automobile.

**Elisa:** How about cooking in your family? Who did the cooking?

**John:** Cooking was by coal; coal stove, large kitchen.

**Elisa:** Done primarily by your mother?

**John:** By my mother, yes.

**Elisa:** Do you remember what she would make? Do you remember a typical dinner?

**John:** When she took me to school in America, in Los Angeles, there was a great debate in grammar school as to what grade I should be in. They finally decided I’d be in the third grade because that was equal to what I had gone to school for two and a half years in Scotland. You started four and a half and they called the grades ‘standards’. I had been in the second standard and they translated that into the third grade.

In the process of all that, I was about the first Scottish kid that that school had ever had and so there was a lot of questioning and one of them was what did I eat? My mother, who was quick on the trigger sometimes, said, “Soup, meat and pudding”, which in a way describes what we ate. We had plenty of meat, plenty of vegetables; Scottish people are heavy on soups. She makes her own bread as well as bakery stuff that she’d get.

**Elisa:** What was your favorite thing that she would make? Is there something that you like more than…?

**John:** Roast beef.

**Elisa:** Do you remember your grandparents?

**John:** I only remember one grandparent; that would be on my mother’s side. She went to be 96. She lived in Edinburgh by herself. She’s a rather an amazing woman; she was a mother of 17 children. Her husband was a career army man in the British Army as a nurse to surgeon when he retired. She was the only that I knew. I remember we visited her. She lived in Edinburgh in what they call a flat; row houses. I remember going there two or three times with my mother. The rest of them had passed on.

**Elisa:** Before you were born?

**John:** Yes.

**Elisa:** Can you tell me a little about religious life in Scotland? Are you religious?

**John:** Most Scottish people, about 98% plus, are Presbyterians. There are very few Catholics. My folks went to church and we went to Sunday school regularly. I was baptised in the Presbyterian Church in Cupar. This brings us again to an interesting story.

We arrived in Los Angeles and the first [unclear 00:14:03] around. It’s traditional in Scotland that you dressed up your young kids for Sunday school, and dressing up in Scotland means wearing a kilt. Seven years old, my mother dressed me up in my kilt and off I go down the street, three of four blocks, to the Presbyterian Church. Needless to say, this was riot. The American kids had never seen anything like this. We went through all the routines that you’d get kidded about about kilts. What’s a kilt? What do you wear under it?

I might add that that was the first and last time that I wore a kilt.

**Elisa:** How about holiday celebrations? Do you remember a holiday, growing up in Scotland, that you can tell me about?

**John:** No I don’t.

**Elisa:** How about school? Obviously you did go to school in Scotland. Can you tell me about what the schools were like?

**John:** I went to what was the equivalent of American grammar school. It was in a nice location. There were nice buildings, good teachers, individual desks…

**Elisa:** What was your favorite subject?

**John:** I really don’t remember a favorite subject.

**Elisa:** How about playmates or other children that you went to school with?

**John:** No I don’t.

**Elisa:** Do you remember any games that you would play in Scotland?

**John:** Soccer; everybody played soccer in Scotland. Soccer is like American football. It’s beginning to catch on here but in countries like Scotland and lot other ones it’s the number one.

**Elisa:** So as a small boy you played soccer after school?

**John:** Yes.

**Elisa:** Coming to America, can you tell me who decided to come to America and why you came here?

**John:** Yes. My father, after he served his apprenticeship as a coach builder, worked for a couple years and then went to South Africa in the 1890s during the diamond rush. Being a skilled wood worker as he was, the work that he got was as a foreman first on the railroads and later in the mines. He worked for the mines. He spent five years there and saved quite a bit of his salary. He was single. He went with a buddy of his by the name David Harold.

He came home to Scotland and met my mother and married her. He had saved enough money that he wanted to go on a business for himself and so he bought this business that I’d referred to earlier in Cupar Fife.

During World War One, again because he was a skilled wood worker, he left the shops in the hands of two or three real old men who were too old for military service. World War One practically all the youth of Scotland was in the Army. My dad, because he was skilled in wood working, was made superintendent of air companies; body frame. The body frames of airplanes in World War One were made out of wood and then covered. He was a superintendent of airframe for about three years.

An interesting point in that is that because he was considered fairly well- to- do because he had his business, he didn’t accept any money from the government for that whole time; that was gratuities. When the World War One ended, he was the first guy in Cupar to know about it because he had gotten a message at the airframe factory and he rode a bike into Cupar and told them the war was over.

He tried to bring his business back. Originally this was a shop that had about 25 employees doing new construction and repair work. He tried to bring his business back but the economic conditions as a result of World War One in Scotland were very poor. The farmers were not making any money and if they had a broken down wagon, they didn’t have any money to fix it or they’d bring it in and he’d fix it and put it on the books. They were not buying hardly anything new. He kept trying to bring his business back but was not successful in that and he was going broke.

Also, he had a secondary conviction thought in mind, and that was the education of his five kids. Scots people traditionally are very education-minded. They shove and push for better schools and better education. Remembering his time in South Africa, and he was a prolific reader, he had read a lot about California, the orange groves, the climate, land of opportunity and all the things you still hear about. He decided that we should immigrate to Southern California.

In this transition he auctioned off his shop and all the equipment, he auctioned off our home and then we were ready to go but there was a problem with the quota system. As I get the story from my folks, they had thought that they had the seven quota numbers necessary for the family to travel together but when they came through, only four came through. This caused a big debate between my father and mother. My mother wanted my father to take the three oldest children and go and she would wait for additional quotas sometime in the future.

He knew how to do that so we ended by being part in a little town called Craik on the beach front waiting for additional quota numbers and that took several months before we got them. We finally got them and the seven of us left from Liverpool on the ship, Baltic, for New York.

The primary reason for immigrating was lousy economic conditions and didn’t look like any much opportunity for us kids brought us all here. I might add, without trying to be too egotistical, that all of my brothers and sisters did very well in our new countries.

**Elisa:** [inaudible 00:23:01]. What did your mother feel about coming to this country? Did she want to come to this country?

**John:** Yes. I think that she was just as motivational to come as my father was.

**Elisa:** Did anyone give you a party when you left?

**John:** No. I remember one thing about… I think that was the first time I had ever had a Hershey bar. One of the ship’s officers gave me a Hershey bar and I remember that quite clearly.

**Elisa:** Where did you stay on the boat? First class? Second class? Steerage?

**John:** We were in third class.

**Elisa:** Do you remember where you slept? Do you remember what that looked like or what it was like?

**John:** Yes. There were large cabins. We were all together as I recall. It was not the best but it was alright.

**Elisa:** Do you remember what you brought with you? Anything that you wanted to take with you when you left Scotland?

**John:** No. My mother and father brought quite a lot of stuff with them. One of the criticisms that I have of what I’ve been seeing about the Ellis Island project is that you diplict a lot of down-trodden types and poorly dressed with bags on the top of their heads. Much more so you don’t do much with people that are coming that are not in that kind of a category. Those are primarily the South Europeans that are really poor but actually there was people, like our family, that were fairly decent-type citizens in education, background, appearance. You never caught my father without a suit on. He dressed formally all the time. That was one change.

When we hit Ellis Island, everything was going great until my mother had some kind of a medical problem; I don’t know what it was but it required additional test so the end result was that we stayed on Ellis Island for about four days. That was something different because on Ellis Island the men were here and the women were there so for the first in a long time our family was separated, although they could visit sometime during the day.

It took us about four extra days to get through the Ellis Island. I don’t remember too much about that but I do recall that we slept in bunk beds and dad was busy looking after us all the time.

**Elisa:** What was the name of your ship?

**John:** Baltic, B-A-L-T-I-C. It’s a British ship.

**Elisa:** Do you remember any of the meals that you had when you were on the ship?

**John:** No.

**Elisa:** How about on Ellis Island? Do you remember eating?

**John:** Hard-boiled eggs. I remember that, other than that I don’t know.

**Elisa:** Describe the scene for me. Do you remember other people at Ellis Island that were staying there? Were there a lot of different languages being spoken?

**John:** Yes, plenty of foreign languages. It was the melting pot for sure. There were people there from all walks and strata of life and a lot of them were in the category that you would play in the literature but…

**Elisa:** Were there other Scottish people there? Do you remember meeting anyone else from Scotland?

**John:** I don’t know.

**Elisa:** Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

**John:** Yes, very clearly. We were up on deck and that was the first thing that everybody knows we’re coming in and everybody lines up to look at it.

**Elisa:** Were you examined medically? Your mother was examined but do you remember…?

**John:** We were all examined.

**Elisa:** What can you tell me about that?

**John:** Pretty much routine, figured where the arms and legs were. I remember they tested your eyes and your hearing and your throat. That would be about it; nothing in the way of x-ray reading. It was a fast go-through-a- line kind of project somewhat similar to going into the military in United States.

**Elisa:** Do you remember any type of entertainment while you were on Ellis Island? What did you do for the five days that you were there as a small child? Did you get into any trouble? Did you explore?

**John:** I don’t recall any games. We got to go outside, I know that. I guess we just went outside and walked around and looked at the harbor and looked at New York. I doubt whether there was any programming going on, any recreational systems or anything like that.

**Elisa:** When you left Ellis Island who came to pick you up and how did you leave?

**John:** My mother had a sister had a sister living in New York, who was married. She and her husband were the managers of one of the big apartment buildings that they have in New York. We were coming to her.

**Elisa:** What was her name?

**John:** Her name was May and her last name was Robb, R-O-B-B. They managed the apartment building. We were picked up by them, went to the apartment…

**Elisa:** How did you get there?

**John:** In a taxi. We stayed there for about a week and then we came by train, what they called the Southerner which would be from New York to Washington D.C, New Orleans and across to Los Angeles.

**Elisa:** Do you remember that trip?

**John:** I remember that trip very well. The train down through the south was not air-conditioned in those days. It was hot in there. Keep in mind that I came from Scotland which is a cool climate area and when it runs up in the 90s that’s hot. Anyway, I remember that and I remember that great selling of ice cream cones on the train. The kids got ice cream cones all the time.

I also should reflect on some of the information that my mother had picked up about Southern California turned out to be erroneous. The family came equipped with Panama hats. She bought us all big Panama hats. She thought that we were going to be out in the torrent sun so they kidded us on the train.

In those days in order to come to this country, you had to have somebody sponsor you. We had a sponsor by the name of Alexander Monroe, who lived in Los Angeles. He was a second cousin relative to my mother. He was my mother’s sister’s son. They were the ones that signed up the deal that we would not be living on charity. They signed up for us and so we moved in to their house which was on Boulevard Street in the York area of Los Angeles. We only stayed there about a week for time for my folks to find a house to live in.

My dad found a job with the Los Angeles City Railroad, the old- fashioned what they called the Yellow Cars. He worked in there where he [unclear 00:34:17]. I went to school.

**Elisa:** What was school like? Was it much different?

**John:** My initial recollection of school was that everybody was very curious about me. I was the only Scotch kid in the school and what’s more, I think some of those teachers were a little bit misinformed in life in Scotland. I don’t know how this came up but my mother was having a conversation with one of the teachers and it got on to the subject of music. She said something about the fact that we had had our own piano in Scotland. The teacher’s retort to that was, “Did you have pianos?” There was not much cross country information.

We had some interesting experience but that was short-lived; soon you were being treated like an American kid. I guess I had an accent for a little while but when you go to school and mix with other American kids you quickly lose your accent. You turn it on if you have to though.

**Elisa:** And your house in Los Angeles?

**John:** We moved around a little bit but basically we got a house big enough for the family. We had a four-bedroom house. We were little sparse on furniture for a while because my mother was interested in what she brought from Scotland. My dad being a wood worker, he built a big chest of drawers and she packed all of our linens. British people have lots of linens. They got barrels and packed all of our dishes, kitchenware and all of bedroom stuff were shipped through the Panama Canal and up here.

We had all that but when it came to basic furniture for everything, it took us a little while to accumulate that because my dad had spent a lot of money waiting for us to get our quota numbers and then by the time he arrived in Los Angeles he was a bit short. But the housing was good.

**Elisa:** What was your first job?

**John:** American Can Company. I graduated from college in 1938…

**Elisa:** Where did you go to school?

**John:** I went to University of Redlands. In 1938 when I graduated that was supposed to be a Depression year but I was fortunate. I got a job with American Can Company. From my background, I’ve been in personnel business all my life, 40 years, so I’m fairly quite acquainted with discrimination and non-discrimination, what you do for minorities and what you don’t do for minorities.

American Can Company is a big outfit with plants all over the country. The Los Angeles plant was the one that hired me and the conditions of my hiring were a little bit different in this business of discrimination or not. The district office, which would be in San Francisco, had instructed the Los Angeles office and factory to recruit some young college kids each year; two, three, or four depending on their circumstances.

The plant in Los Angeles was managed by a gentleman by the name of [unclear 00:39:43]; very Italian. Several of the plant’s supervisory structure were likewise Italian. They did lot of business with the fish industry in Los Angeles Harbor and provided cans, where the fish industry also had a lot of Italians.

When he got the instructions that he was supposed to hire some college kids, his idea of college recruitment was to go over to Loyola University, which is a Catholic University, see the priest and say, “Send over a couple of your boys”. That had been going on for three or four years and they practically always were football players and so the youngsters coming up in the training for management jobs were graduates of Loyola, all Catholic, in that kind of referral system. The district office finally tumbled to this and said mix this up.

I was in the first group to mix it up. I was a University of Redling’s graduate, and there was a UCLA graduate hired at the same time; the two of us. We came in to a situation where I wouldn’t say we weren’t wanted, but I would say that we were breaking the ice and it was a little tasking for a while. As usual, I had played football myself so I’d played football against a couple of these guys so we broke down the ice and it worked out alright. I worked at American Can Company until… that’s where I met my wife by the way… for about four years and then the war started; World War Two.

**Elisa:** Tell me how you met your wife.

**John:** There was a front office to the Can Company and then there were manufacturing buildings in the back. She worked in the front office and I was in the personnel office which was part of the industrial structure so I was in another building with the industrial guys as against she being in the main office which was the accounting and payroll and stuff.

But the Coca-Cola machine was out in the entrance to the industrial plant so the people from front office, if they wanted a Coke, had to come out to the Coke machine and that’s where I met my wife. She was getting Coke, so was I.

Next deal is the World War One. I was draft age. I was registered to draft. When it looked like my number was going to come up, I didn’t want to go on the army. I had been around the waterfront much of my life so I wanted to go on the Navy. This relates another story of possible or related discrimination.

I had not become a citizen until I was 21 because my father had not taken out papers and so I didn’t benefit from what they call a derivative citizenship. I had to wait until I was eligible and myself I filed and I became eventually a citizen when I became 21 years of age. I’d filed the papers ahead of time.

When it looked like I was going to be drafted I ran down… all the guys who went to school with me running down and getting commissions in the Marine Corps, Navy. I ran down to the Navy; everything great, I’ve got good grades, healthy, but I had not been a citizen for 10 years. There was a regulation for commissioning people directly that you had to be a citizen for 10 years before you get commissioned. The Navy guys tell me that and I didn’t like it of course so I ran around to the Coast Guard, Marine, the Army, all of them the same.

About that point the draft guys were getting ready to breath down my throat so I enlisted in the Navy as enlisted man. This was an interesting experience for me. The last thing in the world I ever expected to do was to be in the military service. However, I was.

You go to boot camp down in San Diego and they gave you a bunch of tests. After the tests, the results of the tests are reviewed after about three weeks. Meantime you’re marching up and down till it goes out of style. The [unclear 00:46:09] look out the chance scores and found that I was a university graduate and found that I had worked in personnel administration. The personal office was having lots of problems so they sent for me about the third week of boot camp and wanted to know if I wanted to work in the personnel office. They pulled me out of boot camp, which was great. So I went to work in the personnel office.

There’s whole bunch of ratings in the Navy and I could run step by step through them but I won’t. Anyway, I got promoted fast. When I was a first class petty officer, they sent me off to a school in Baltimore, Maryland, that was the personnel classification type of school. There was about 130 men in the class. This was the first one that they had.

All these other men were primarily guys who couldn’t get a commission for one reason or another. For instance, the man that sat next to me had a PhD in Psychology and taught at Oklahoma University, but his figure was cut off at the end here so he couldn’t get commissioned. There was a lot of people there, all kinds of educational backgrounds, most of them sharp cookies.

We go through this school for four weeks. Each week they give us a test and at the end of the four weeks they posted the listing and out of 130, I ranked fourth. The next deal was personal interviews. I was first class petty officer. They said that they were authorized to make me a chief and they wanted to ship me off to Newport, Rhode Island. In the meantime I had just moved my wife to San Diego.

The officer in charge of the office in San Diego he said that he didn’t want them to make any of his men chiefs. He wanted to do it himself so I was returned to San Diego. I didn’t want to go to Newport as a first class but the guys in the bureau, they were personnel in Washington, that had talked to me, they didn’t agree with this guy. They, in about a week, sent a telegram that to rate me a chief and send me to the diesel classification school.

The reason for that was that I knew personnel work and I also happened to know quite a bit about internal combustion engines because all the way through school I worked in garages and even knew a little bit about diesel. I went to the diesel school and then the orders were for further transfer to the receiving station in San Francisco, where I was to establish a diesel classification office. That was the first one in the Navy. There was one established here and one established in Norfolk at the same time.

The problem was that the Navy had a lot of ships with diesel engines. They vary in size from 25 horsepower engines up to 3,000 horsepower engines, had ones that are slow engines, high speed engines, they had minor engines, they had V-type engines and opposed piston engines. When they had all these ships coming out with diesel engines, they didn’t how to assign men aboard those ships that do those engines.

The idea was I was to set up, along with another guy, a screening process to screen the machinists mates and the modern machinist mates of the Navy as they came through the receiving ship, and classify them by the types of engines and they type of equipment that they knew; whether they were just operators or whether they were capable of repair work. We assigned them accordingly.

That was a great deal for me because I got a chance to do something brand new all on my own. Nobody was telling me what to do. The funny thing was, here I was, only a chief petty officer, and I was directing all kinds of stuff. At that point, we had a number two officer of the receiving ship that’s a great big place where there was about 30,000 men a month coming through on assignment to their specific wars. He was a captain in the regular Navy and he also was an ex- submariner on submarines. I had to sign up for that statutory diesel classification center and after a while, he came around all in inspection. I’ll never forget this man.

He sat on the corner of my desk, full captain of the Navy, way up there at that time, and he talked to me. He said, “What’s this all about?” He asked me about what I was doing, how it came about. He went away and in about two hours, his chief yeoman, that’s the head secretary guy in his office call me and he said, “Do you have a copy of the transcript of your university?” I said, “No I don’t but I can get it.” He says, “Captain Bradford wants to get you a commission”. I got a hold of a copy of my college transcripts that prove that I was a graduate. We filled out the forms and I gave it to them.

Seven days later I was commissioned. He sent it directly to a classmate of his in the Bureau of Naval Personnel in Washington, they commissioned me, sent him back a telegraph that I was commissioned an instant with the date. I had an interesting experience there. I finally got the commission even if I didn’t have 10 years citizenship. I ran that; that got to be a big operation. They sent me to another location, to Schumacher, to start another one just like it. I did that. At the very end of the way they sent me down to San Diego and I was the officer in charge down there.

I think, when I look at my career, I that I’ve really been fortunate in that only twice in my life have I looked for a job. I looked for a job when I got out of college and I had to look for a job when I got out of the Navy. I ended up by going to work for the Veterans’ Administration in West Los Angeles. I worked there for about four years when one of the doctors there who had been appointed the manager of a brand new hospital in Mount Rose, New York which is up the river from New York City next to Peekskill. He called me in and said he wanted to know if I’d like to go and be the personnel officer there. I had the number two job in West Los Angeles so the number one would be a good idea and also again gave me the opportunity to start something from the grassroots up, so I opened up the hospital area, which was the largest one that the VA opened after World War Two.

I was there about a year when I get a call from a guy in the Bureau of Engraving and Printing of the Treasury Department in Washington D.C. The Bureau of Engraving is where they print US currency, postage stamps, and all those security documents of the country. It’s also a printing operation.

Printing unions are the strongest type unions that are in this country. They had something like 26 separate unions for all the different skills in the printing and engraving business. They were having union trouble. They didn’t have anybody that knew too much about unions. I had worked with unions at the American Can Company.

Also, in the educational bit I should back up and say that when I was working for the VA, I went to night school at UCLA, under the GI bill, and I completed the work 24 semester hours for a certificate in industrial relations, which was all about unions. This call that I got from the Treasury men said that they were looking for somebody in the personnel business that knew unions. I ended up going down there, getting interviewed, getting hired.

Three years there, which was a real team job, when a chief clerk of the civil service and post office committee up on the Hill for the House of Representatives called me up on the phone and said that the Army Quartermaster Corps was under investigations for some problems they had that were largely personnel administration type problems and would I be interested in going over there? I went over and talked to them, and each one of these of course is a step up the total bull by the grip. They offered me the job so I took the job. I was the head of the Army Quartermaster Corps personnel program for about six years. They had installations all over the United States so I travelled a lot.

**Elisa:** Mr. John we’re going to pause this for a bit so we can change the tape. We’re back with tape number two, with Mr. John Will, and we’re talking about his life and careers after he came to America.

**John:** After my service with Quartermaster Corps… the Army has great statistical and comparison information about what all the various commands do. They rank major commands as to how they are doing in the various personnel program areas. I was fortunate enough to be able to bring the Quartermaster Corps rankings way up in practically every category.

As a result of that, I was asked by the Director of Civilian Personnel for the US Army Headquarters. This is a big personnel operation. It is 485,000 employees working in approximately 85 different countries. Many of those are foreign national type employees, where we hired people to work in their own country and then we would send over some American type personnel to work with them.

They called me and asked me if I would like to come over and talk to them about the deputy job, that would be the number two job, to this whole operation. I went over and I got hired. Here again they came to me. That was a job that I had for about three and a half years. That was an amazing position because I literally travelled the world.

My superior, although he liked to travel, he was tired of it and the end result was that I got a lot of the assignments. Taken Tokyo, Okinawa, Korea, Alaska, Panama, Europe, as well as many installations in the United States. In between trips I was the deputy. This was a real good deal and again I got a lot of credit for things because I didn’t like the overseas personnel program that I found.

At that time the military, and keep in mind I was an ex-naval officer working for the Army, I found that they were hiring civilian employees for overseas for a year, two years depending on where it was. That was their term. They were not built in to a careers system so that when they got finished with their two years there, some of them got renewed but then they had the business of coming back and where would they go? There was no system. They were peddled around to see if anybody wanted to take them into their commands.

This was not a very popular operation because the commands had their own people they wanted to promote and most of the overseas types were in the fairly high grades. One of my contributions was to get going hard on the career program. The career program meant that you were going to have a rotation system. You were going to rotate some of these people from [unclear 01:04:02], overseas for a couple years and then we rotate them back into the system and they would be guaranteed a proper placement in accordance with their background and grades.

That took a while to sell and it took a while to get actually operational. In the meantime, we had what was called home status. Home status was employees whom had gotten jobs overseas and they were dug in. They were more like the citizens of that country than the citizens were. That was particularly true in Okinawa. I was sent over there to clean that one out and there was people on the island in civilian personnel jobs and in other kind of jobs too, not just in civilian personnel. In Okinawa they run the whole civil government. They had a Supreme Court with a whole bunch of US citizens running the Supreme Court for the Okinawans. We changed all that and that was well established; the career program.

In the process of all this I had become very well acquainted with the people of the Civil Service Commission naturally; particularly the late John Massey who was chairman of the commission and had been the personnel advisor to President Johnson. Massey liked my work, heard the Director of Personnel jobs for Department of Commerce was going to be available. The gentleman there was retiring. Massey called me up and talked to me about it and the end result was I went over there for interview by the officials of the Commerce Department and I was hired for that. I worked there for 10 years. That again was a kind of a renewal project.

Their system was old-fashioned. It was not automated. First thing I had to do was to automate it. I found out what I had. The office didn’t know what they had. They didn’t know what kind of programs they had out in the field, didn’t know what was good and what was bad but when you automate it you can get all the statistics in and get all the information and you can get an indication, along with personal visits. We worked on that for a while and I was there for 10 years.

During the time I was there in my later years, I became a trouble shooter on occasion for the Federal Service Commission. When they had problems… lot of personnel men are not operational- minded. I had done practically everything there was on the way up the total pole so that I was very operational-minded and knew operations. I was borrowed by the Civil Service Commission first one was to go to the Office of Economic Opportunity which was run by [unclear 01:08:08] at that time. They had personnel problems. I spent 30 day detail there.

Another one, which was really fun, was the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. They were having union problems down at Huntsville, Alabama which was a big center. It was directed by [unclear 01:09:38]. Germans basically are not very good at personnel administration. They are more of the dictatorial type; command performance. I went down there and worked on their program for a while, which involved some visits with [unclear 01:10:06]. I was there a month, worked on that, came back and in about another month I got another call from Massey. He wanted me to go to Kennedy, which is another part of NASA.

Likewise, they were having personnel problems that primarily involved civilian employees versus contract employees. I got to be used on those types of things. Also, I had a lot of experience in employing the handicapped. I served on the President’s committee for employing the handicapped for about 10 years. I got a presidential plaque, which is on the wall out there, for my service on that.

I decided to take an early retirement in 1974 primarily because the federal employees had a salary cap at that time, much like the baseball guys. I had been at the top salary for about three and a half years. What that meant, operational, was that when the staff and the regular employees would get a cost of living increase of 3% or 5%, I wouldn’t get anything and so as I sat still at one salary, several of the staff members that worked for me and in different bureaus, they were sneaking up on me all the time.

The end result is I had about 15 people in commerce personnel that were making the same salary as I was. I didn’t like that very well, plus the fact that I had been in the job for 10 years and that’s too long in one job. 5 years is ideal but 10 years is way past it. If I hadn’t gotten out there the chances of some of the other people on the staff to get promoted were blocked.

I took an early retirement and in as much we had originally come from here, we ended up coming back to California and we settled here. One other stint that I did since I’ve been here I spent a year on the Orange County Grand Jury, which I was the chairman of the administration committee. That’s the work history.

**Elisa:** What can you tell me about your family? Did you have any children? How many children?

**John:** I have one son, Tom, who is a graduate of the five-year school at University of Virginia, engineering. The five- year business is you can get a mechanical engineering degree in four years, you take an extra year and you get some of the humanities.

Right out of school he got a job with Rohm and Haas chemical firm which is in Bristol, Pennsylvania. He has done exceedingly well. He is the head project manager for the whole corporate company. He travels the world like I did in the army. I think he does me one better because not very long ago he told me that he got an airplane, went to London for one day for a meeting and came back. I thought to myself, “Rohm and Haas must have plenty of money”. Anyway, he’s done very well.

I only have one son. I have three grandchildren; the grandson is the oldest. He is an accounting manager for Discover Card Company and he just recently gave us our first great granddaughter. One other granddaughter works for a tracking firm and then the other one just graduated from the University of Delaware this year.

**Elisa:** Are you glad that your family came to this country? How would you answer that?

**John:** I’d answer that very strongly in the affirmative. Economic conditions certainly were poor in Scotland and for a young man growing up in Scotland in my era, your choices were pretty much you go to sea you become a marine engineer or you go in the army. Quite a few of my cousins are marine engineers on ships. Scotch guys are famous for that.

I would say that bringing us here was the best and the kindest thing in the world that my parents could do; to bring us to a place where we had opportunity. They kid all you want to about United States and California as a land of opportunity but it is. I’ve just ran through my career and I worked 40 years in personnel business and only twice did I have to look for a job; they came to me. In my case it certainly worked out.

Look at the navy experience when I couldn’t get a commission direct. I got in there and I got one anyway. So a lot of these things have always been, in my judgement, the best for me and the best for family even if some of them have been fortuities.

**Elisa:** Thank you very much Mr. Will for this interview. I’m here in the home of John Will with his wife March, and Peter Ham who’s been doing the recording. This is Elisa Mattson signing off for the National Park Service on the 16th of September 1994 for the Ellis Island Oral History Project.