

The American Lad from Ireland  
The Story of Nelson Curtis's American Journey

Samantha Murphy

History 210 D04

Prof. Diffley

Spring 2009

Since the late 1800s immigrants made their way into America, the country of opportunity and the land of the free. Most immigrants came from a harsh life full of poverty and constant struggle. Belfast, Ireland was one of those places. My grandfather's family came to America like so many people before them to get a taste of freedom and to earn a better life for themselves. It may have been hard to get to where they are today but they were eventually able to pursue a life of happiness and eventually call America their home.

Nelson Henry-Stanley Curtis was born 1946 in Belfast, Ireland. Belfast is in the Northern part of Ireland and was ruled by the British. Although being famous for the birthplace of the infamous Titanic, Belfast like many other parts of Ireland was a place of poverty. It was also not an independent part of Ireland unlike Southern Ireland was. If someone were to hang an Irish flag they would be hung. Under the British rule they had no independence. The Northern Irishmen did however speak English since they were ruled by an English speaking nation. This would make the transition to American lifestyle much easier for Nelson and his family.

In 1960, when he was fourteen years old Nelson made the biggest journey of his life. His family was to move to America. His cousin had told Nelson's father about this great country that was full of job opportunities and better living. His cousin had been living in America for quite some time and would become The Curtis' sponsor on their journey to America. Nelson's family would travel by plane to Logan Airport in Boston and from there start a new life in America.

Nelson's family moved and settled in Forest Park Springfield, Massachusetts. Their new house was big enough for two families to live in and at the time all they could afford. They did not live near friends and family, or other immigrants for that matter. The other family that they shared a house with as well as the rest of the neighborhood was all American people. Although Nelson's family was the only Irish immigrant family on the block, it was not so hard to fit in since they already spoke English. The Irish protestant family was also able to go to Trinity Methodist Church where they practiced their religion. Nelson attended Forest Park school where he would have to make new friends and try to fit in.

Nelson was more excited than scared coming into America. He was of course nervous going into a new school and meeting new people. He says it wasn't hard though, and he was never criticized for being an immigrant. "At that age we all looked different" he says. "Some Americans I knew even wished they were Irish like me!" Although this country was quite a change for Nelson, he had an easier time fitting in compared to that of his father's experience.

When the family came to America Nelson's father was already in his late forties. It was harder for him to get a job at first because of his age. Many employers would much rather hire a strapping young American than an old Irish immigrant. Eventually Nelson's father was able to work for a gas company and made just enough money to make ends meet for his family. Nelson realizes now that his family was not well off, but he recalls a lot of families during that time being financially average or similar to his family.

Living in America Nelson's lifestyle completely changed. America was by far more technologically advanced than Ireland was. There were also a mixture of races and cultures that Nelson had never seen before. Nelson had never seen another skin tone much different from his own before coming to America. Simple things such as cars, highways, electric wiring, and even refrigerators were all unavailable in Ireland and plentiful in America. This new country was completely different from his native land and so full of excitement and endless opportunities in this young Irish boy's eyes.

Nelson did miss some things about Ireland. Sports he played such as football (soccer), rugby, and cricket were not well known or popular in America. His family ate different meals than they did while living in Ireland. While in Ireland all the food they ate was rich and fresh. Nelson also recalls a lot of pubs being in Ireland where Irishmen not only went to drink, but got together and played music while telling stories of lore. There weren't any places like that in America. Although there were some aspects of Irish life that Nelson missed, he knew that America was a better place all around, and he wouldn't trade coming to America for the world.

After Nelson's family left Ireland, the place they once called home broke out into civil war over religion among other issues. Nelson knows that if he were to go back it wouldn't be a pleasant visit as so many things have changed. It seems that his family made the right decision in leaving Ireland when they did. In America he has his freedom and a stable life, something that wasn't possible in Ireland.

In 1999 my grandfather, Nelson Curtis became a U.S. citizen. Coming to America changed his life for the better. My grandfather now has his citizenship as well as pride

knowing that he came to be an independent man, being born in a non-independent country. His family and him have come a long way. My grandfather wouldn't change his experiences for the world. He says that this is his home, and he is happy and proud to be an American.